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**ANNUAL REPORT ON
INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
2005**

REPORT

SUBMITTED TO THE

COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AND THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
U.S. SENATE

BY THE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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

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FOREWORD

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

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

HENRY J. HYDE,

Chairman, Committee on International Relations.

RICHARD G. LUGAR,

Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations.

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

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

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On behalf of Secretary Rice, we are pleased to transmit the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom 2005*. This report is submitted in compliance with Sec. 102 of P.L. 105–292, the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which calls for a report to describe and assess the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom in each country, to describe U.S. actions and policies in support of religious freedom, and to provide specified information on a variety of topics related to religious freedom.

The report reviews the status of religious freedom in 197 countries or areas, provides an overview of U.S. policy on religious freedom and information about U.S. actions taken to address religious freedom issues in each country. The report is available on the Department of State web page at www.state.gov.

We hope you find this information helpful. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

MATTHEW A. REYNOLDS, *Acting Assistant Secretary.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With gratitude, we acknowledge those whose diligent labor and tireless commitment to religious freedom made this report possible. We thank the many Foreign Service officers at our embassies and consulates abroad for monitoring and promoting religious freedom, and for chronicling in detail the status of religious liberty. Their work advances the cause of freedom, ensures accuracy in our reporting, and brings hope to repressed people around the world.

Within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Office of International Religious Freedom, we wish to recognize David Abramson, Ben Bahney, Philip Barth, Warren Cofsky, Tammy Crittenden, Doug Dearborn, Todd Deatherage, Kenneth Durkin, Rachel Ellis, Acquania Gibbs, Nancy Hewett, Rachel Howard, Victor Huser, Shellette Jackson, Patrick Kelly, Stephen Liston, Kathryn Lurie, Michael Mates, Janet Mayland, Joannella Morales, Naseem Poshtkouhi, Matthew Schmolesky, Deborah Schneider, Stephen Wertheim, Jessica Woods, and David Young. In the Office of Multilateral Affairs, we wish to recognize Laura Gentile and Gianni Paz.

We are particularly grateful to the Office of Country Reports and Asylum Affairs for its assistance and guidance in the handover of the Report to the Office of International Religious Freedom. In the Office of Strategic and External Affairs, we extend our thanks to Sally Buikema, David Denehy, Carol Finerty, and Sarah Lohmann. In the Office of the Executive Director, we are indebted to the work of Jonathan Tull. Finally, a hearty thanks to the legions of Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor employees who donated proofreading time.

PREFACE

2005 REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Why The Reports Are Prepared

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

How the Reports are Prepared

In 1998 the Secretary of State established the Office of International Religious Freedom within the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. In May 2002, John V. Hanford, III was sworn in as the second Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, and has the responsibility for preparing the Report for the Secretary of State.

The 2005 Report covers the period from July 1, 2004, to June 30, 2005, and reflects a year of dedicated effort by hundreds of State Department, Foreign Service, and other U.S. Government employees. Our embassies, which prepared the initial drafts of the reports, gathered information throughout this period from a variety of sources, including government and religious officials, nongovernmental organizations, journalists, human rights monitors, religious groups, and academics. This information-gathering can be hazardous, and U.S. Foreign Service Officers regularly go to great lengths, under trying and sometimes dangerous conditions, to investigate reports of human rights abuse, to monitor elections, and to come to the aid of individuals at risk because of their religious beliefs.

For the first time, the embassies sent the 2005 drafts directly to the Office of International Religious Freedom, which assumed full responsibility for the Report. As the office worked to collaborate, analyze and edit the reports, the officers drew on the expertise of other State Department offices, and referenced reports provided by U.S. and other human rights groups, foreign government officials, representatives from the United Nations and other international and regional organizations and institutions, and experts from academia and the media. Officers also consulted with experts on issues of religious discrimination and persecution, religious leaders from all faiths, and experts on legal matters. The guiding principle was to ensure that all relevant information was assessed as objectively, thoroughly, and fairly as possible.

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

A Word on Usage

In many cases, the International Religious Freedom Report states that a country “generally respects” the right of religious freedom. The phrase “generally respects” is used because the protection and promotion of human rights is a dynamic endeavor; it cannot accurately be stated that any Government fully respects these rights,

without qualification, in even the best of circumstances. Accordingly, “generally respects” is the standard phrase used to describe all countries that attempt to protect religious freedom in the fullest sense. “Generally respects” is thus the highest level of respect for religious freedom assigned by this report.

INTRODUCTION

Just two blocks from the White House in Washington, D.C., in front of the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, is a memorial to Oscar Straus, one of the premier U.S. statesmen of the early twentieth. Two statues represent what Straus cherished most about this country—our high esteem for enterprise, on the one hand, and our commitment to freedom of religion on the other. At the base of the monument to religious freedom—a woman, representing “Justice,” with her arm resting on the Ten Commandments—the inscription reads: “Our Liberty of Worship is not a Concession nor a Privilege but an Inherent Right.”

What Straus saw in this nation, and what those who sought to honor his life memorialized, were the modern manifestations of themes intertwined throughout America’s history. In the seventeenth century, it was men and women seeking to escape religious persecution who, at the same time, laid the foundation for our nation’s prosperity through their determination and perseverance. In the eighteenth century, it was Thomas Jefferson, a leader determined to see his country benefit from the latest scientific advances, who also drafted the first law protecting religious freedom in America. “No man shall be compelled,” Jefferson wrote, to frequent or support any religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion.”

In the nineteenth century, with a civil war looming, it was President James Buchanan who expressed his great fear that such a war might diminish America’s role in the advancement of civil and religious liberty throughout the world. And it was President Ulysses Grant, contemplating the difficult task of rebuilding our nation after that devastating war, who highlighted freedom of religion, along with security of property, as essential to ensuring “the greatest good to the greatest number.”

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, citizens of the United States continue to cherish our religious liberty as much as we do our right to pursue economic well-being. President George W. Bush has urged us to be mindful of the deep roots of this basic right in our society. “Our Founding Fathers,” he said, “knew the importance of freedom of religion to a stable and lasting Union. Our Constitution protects individuals’ rights to worship as they choose. Today, we continue to welcome the important contributions of people of faith in our society. We reject religious bigotry in every form, striving for a society that honors the life and faith of every person. As we maintain the vitality of a pluralistic society, we work to ensure equal treatment of faith-based organizations and people of faith.”

America’s resolve to champion the cause of religious freedom around the world is fueled by our history, but it is founded on that “inherent right” which Oscar Straus so valued. Today, we find this fundamental freedom enshrined in various international covenants, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 18 of that foundational United Nations document states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religious or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” In President Bush’s words, religious freedom “is the first freedom of the human soul—the right to speak the words that God places in our mouths. We must stand for that freedom in our country. We must speak for that freedom in the world.” The *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom* is intended to do just that.

A voice on behalf of religious freedom is necessary today because many governments only pay lip service to their responsibilities under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other agreements. Repressive governments are not the only threat to religious liberty in our world, however. So, too, are violent extremists, one of our generation’s principal adversaries in the continuing struggle for freedom. Even as we stand together with those who rightly demand religious freedom, we

must stand firmly against those whose ideologies of hate act as impediments to human liberty and democracy.

The state of religious freedom is not only important in its own right, but is also an indicator of the level of tolerance and stability in the greater society. The pursuit of religious liberty supports other freedoms, including speech, assembly, and conscience. When the cause of religious freedom is furthered, so is the pursuit of democracy. The fact that our country's history evidences a continued deepening and broadening of our core commitment to religious freedom spurs us to protect what we have won and to encourage other governments to meet a high standard, as well. Our record is not perfect. However, our imperfections cannot serve as an excuse to back down from the challenge of making this universal right real for all humankind. "As the United States advances the cause of liberty," President Bush has said, "we remember that freedom is not America's gift to the world, but God's gift to each man and woman in this world. This truth drives our efforts to help people everywhere achieve freedom of religion and establish a better, brighter and more peaceful future for all."

THE ANNUAL REPORT

This annual report, mandated by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, is the product of a year-round effort by hundreds of Foreign Service and Civil Service officers in the Department of State and U.S. missions abroad. Our human rights officers overseas and the staff of the Office of International Religious Freedom, supported by their colleagues in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and in regional bureaus of the State Department, deserve particular credit for their dedication in bringing this report to fruition.

The purpose of this report is to document the actions of governments—those that repress religious expression, persecute innocent believers, or tolerate violence against religious minorities, as well as those that respect, protect, and promote religious freedom. For each country, the report details the legal situation, cultural context, and relevant policies, and describes efforts taken by the U.S. Government to oppose religious persecution and promote religious freedom.

The sad truth which this report exposes is that many millions of religious believers continue to suffer for the belief or practice of their faith, and many governments refuse to recognize or protect this right. That so many endure beatings, torture, imprisonment, and even death is a testament to the resilience of faith. It is our hope that, by documenting their plight, this report will serve both as a testament to the courage of those who suffer, and as a challenge to those of us throughout the world who stand for democracy and freedom. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice poignantly stated earlier this year, "We on the right side of freedom's divide have an obligation to help those unlucky enough to have been born on the wrong side of that divide."

THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom serves as principal advisor to the President and the Secretary of State on advancing religious freedom worldwide. Under their direction, the Office of International Religious Freedom carries out U.S. policy on religious freedom, working closely with our colleagues in the Department of State, other U.S. Government agencies, and U.S. missions overseas in order to maximize the range of diplomatic tools brought to bear on problems of religious freedom. Through formal and informal bilateral negotiations with foreign governments, participation in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, cooperation with human rights and faith-based NGOs, and meetings with victims of abuse, we develop and carry out strategies to address persecution wherever it is found.

As we issue this seventh edition of the *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*, I wish to express appreciation for the strong and vigilant leadership provided by President Bush and Secretary of State Rice on this issue, as well as for the bipartisan support which Congress has provided. We all owe a debt of gratitude, as well, to so many who work in non-governmental organizations on behalf of the oppressed. President Ronald Reagan once said that, "Freedom prospers when religion is vibrant and the rule of law under God is acknowledged." Even as we look to a future in which all will enjoy true religious freedom, our work together honors those around the globe who, like Oscar Straus and President Reagan before them, understand the full meaning of this inherent right.

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Executive Summary consists of three parts. Part I identifies many of the countries where religious freedom is restricted and classifies their actions and policies into five categories. Part II provides examples of nations whose governments have taken significant steps to promote or protect religious freedom, although serious problems may remain in those countries. Part III lists noteworthy actions the U.S. Government has taken in selected countries to encourage other nations to promote religious freedom. Some countries are mentioned in more than one part of the summary, according to the type of action or situation being reported. Within Part I, several of the countries could be listed in more than one of the five categories; however, in the interest of brevity, a given country is listed only once, in the category that best characterizes the fundamental barriers to religious freedom in that country.

Part I: Barriers to International Religious Freedom

TOTALITARIAN OR AUTHORITARIAN ACTIONS TO CONTROL RELIGIOUS BELIEF OR PRACTICE

Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes seek to control religious thought and expression. Such regimes regard some or all religious groups as enemies of the state because of their religious beliefs or their independence from central authority. The practice of religion is often seen as a threat to the state's ideology or power. Oftentimes, the state suppresses religious groups based on the dominant ethnicity of groups.

Burma. The Government continued to engage in particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Government generally infiltrated or monitored the meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious ones. Religious organizations of all faiths also were subject to broad government restrictions on freedom of expression and association. The Government systemically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom, discouraged or prohibited non-Buddhist groups from constructing new places of worship or repairing existing ones, and actively promoted Buddhism over other religions, particularly among members of ethnic minorities. Anti-Muslim violence continued to occur, Muslim activities were monitored, and the Government restricted the ability of Muslims to travel freely. Non-Buddhists experienced employment discrimination at upper levels of the public sector.

China. The Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor. Communist Party officials restated that party membership and religious belief were incompatible. The Government continued to seek to manage religious affairs by restricting religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of activities of religious groups to prevent the rise of possible competing sources of authority outside the control of the Government. Unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference and harassment. Members of some unregistered groups were subjected to restrictions, including intimidation, harassment, and detention. In some localities, "underground" religious leaders reported pressure to register with a government agency or become affiliated with and supervised by an official government-sanctioned religious association. Religious leaders and adherents, including those in official churches, were detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison or reeducation-through-labor camps. Underground Christian groups, Muslim Uighurs, Tibetan Buddhists, and members of groups that the Government considered "cults" were subjected to increased government scrutiny. In some areas, security officials used threats, demolition of unregistered property, extortion, interrogation, detention, and at times beatings and torture to harass leaders of unauthorized groups and their followers. The arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued; those who refused to recant their beliefs

were sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps, and there were credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse.

In Tibetan areas, the Government maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship. Government authorities forcibly suppressed activities they viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, including such religious activities as venerating the Dalai Lama. The most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism, such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama, remained in exile. Dozens of monks and nuns continued to serve prison terms for their resistance to “patriotic education.” The Government refused free access to Tibetan areas for most international observers, tightly controlled observers who were granted access, and closely controlled publication of information about conditions in Tibet. These limitations made it impossible to determine accurately the scope of restrictions on religious freedom.

Cuba. The Government continued to control and monitor religious activities and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups, clergy, and laypersons. The Government ignored unregistered groups’ pending applications for legal recognition. The law allows for the construction of new churches once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government has rarely issued construction permits, forcing many churches to meet in private homes, which also requires a permit. Government harassment of private houses of worship continued, with evangelical denominations reporting evictions from houses used for worship. Religious groups must obtain authorization from the Government to reconstruct or repair existing places of worship; however, the process of obtaining permission and purchasing construction materials from government outlets is lengthy and expensive. The authorities restricted the import and distribution of religious literature and materials and monitored church-run publications. The Government maintained its policy of not allowing the Catholic Church to train or transfer from abroad enough priests for its needs; the Government also did not allow the Church to establish social institutions, including schools and universities, hospitals and clinics, and nursing homes.

North Korea. There was no change in the extremely poor level of respect for religious freedom. Religious freedom does not exist. The regime continued to repress unauthorized religious groups, and there were indications that the regime used authorized religious entities for external propaganda and political purposes and that local citizens were barred from entering their places of worship. Religious persons who proselytized or who had ties to overseas evangelical groups operating in the People’s Republic of China were subjected to arrest and harsh penalties, according to several unconfirmed reports. Defectors continued to allege that the regime arrested and executed members of underground Christian churches in prior years. Over the years, defectors have claimed that Christians were imprisoned and tortured for reading the Bible and talking about God. Due to the inaccessibility of the country and inability to gain timely information, it was difficult to confirm these reports.

STATE HOSTILITY TOWARD MINORITY OR NONAPPROVED RELIGIONS

Some governments, while not implementing full control over minority religions, nevertheless are hostile and repressive towards certain groups or identify them as “security threats.” These governments implement policies designed to demand adherents to recant their faith, cause religious group members to flee the country, or intimidate and harass certain religious groups, or have as their principal effect the intimidation and harassment of certain religious groups.

Eritrea. The Government’s poor respect for religious freedom for minority religious groups continued to worsen. Following a 2002 decree requiring all religious groups to register or cease religious activities, the Government closed all religious facilities not belonging to the four religions registered by the Government. The closures, the Government’s failure to authorize any of the groups that applied for registration, and the arbitrarily enforced restriction on holding religious meetings continued. The Government harassed, arrested, and detained members of Pentecostal and other independent evangelical groups and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Some religious detainees were held in harsh conditions that included extreme temperature fluctuations with limited or no access to family. There also were numerous reports of attempts to force recantations.

Iran. The Government engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Members of religious minorities—including Sunni Muslims, Baha’is, Jews, and Christians—reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. All religious minorities continued to suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employ-

ment, education, and housing. The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs, and state-controlled media conducted a campaign of defamation against the group. Baha'is could not teach or freely practice their faith, nor could they maintain links with co-religionists abroad. The Government vigilantly enforced its prohibition on proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians by closing evangelical churches and arresting converts. In September 2004, security officials arrested 85 leaders of the Assemblies of God Church. The Government's anti-Israel policies, along with a perception among radical Muslims that all Jewish citizens support Zionism and the state of Israel, continued to create a hostile atmosphere for the Jewish community. Sunni Muslims encountered religious discrimination at the local, provincial, and national levels, and there were reports of discrimination against practitioners of the Sufi tradition.

Laos. The Government continued to interpret the Constitution in a manner that restricted religious practice, and application of the law was arbitrary. Persons arrested for their religious activities were sometimes charged with exaggerated security or other criminal offenses. Persons detained could be held for lengthy periods without trial, and an accused person's defense rights were limited. There were five known religious prisoners, all members of the Lao Evangelical Church, the country's domestic Protestant Christian group. Central authorities continued to withhold permission for the printing of non-Buddhist religious material. Central government control over the behavior of local officials was weak. In some areas, local officials displayed intolerance for minority religions, particularly evangelical Protestants. There were reports that local officials pressured Christians to renounce their faith; in two instances, persons were detained and evicted from their villages for resisting such efforts. Local authorities often refused to grant permission to construct new places of worship or repair existing facilities.

Saudi Arabia. Freedom of religion does not exist. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. Religious freedom is not recognized or protected under the country's laws, and basic religious freedoms are denied to all but those who adhere to the state-sanctioned version of Sunni Islam. The Government's official policy is to permit non-Muslims to practice their religions freely at home and in private; however, the Government does not always respect this right in practice. Citizens are denied the freedom to choose or change their religion. Members of the Shi'a minority are subject to officially sanctioned political and economic discrimination, including limited employment opportunities, little representation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and the building of mosques and community centers. The Government enforces a strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam and discriminates against other branches of Islam. The Government prohibits the public practice of other religions; non-Muslim worshippers risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and torture for engaging in religious activity that attracts official attention, especially of the Mutawwa'in (religious police). All public school children receive mandatory religious instruction that conforms to the Salafi tradition. While there was an improvement in press freedom, open discussion of religious issues was limited.

Sudan. The Government considers itself an Islamic government, and Islamization is an objective of the governing party. It continued to place many restrictions on and discriminate against non-Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, and Muslims from tribes or groups not affiliated with the ruling party. Applications to build mosques generally were granted; however, the process for applications to build churches continued to be difficult—the last permit was issued around 1975. Many non-Muslims stated that they are treated as second-class citizens and discriminated against in government jobs and contracts. Some Muslims received preferential treatment regarding limited government services, such as access to medical care, and preferential treatment in court cases involving Muslims against non-Muslims.

Uzbekistan. There was a slight decline in the already poor status of religious freedom. The Government continued its campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups suspected of extremist sentiments or activities. Government authorities arrested numerous alleged members of these groups and sentenced them to lengthy jail terms. In thousands of cases, authorities have asserted membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a banned political organization that encourages terrorism, based solely on outward expressions of devout belief, or have made false assertions of HT membership as a pretext for repressing the innocent expression of religious belief. The Government pressured the banned Islamic group Akromiylar (Akromiya), especially in Tashkent and Andijon, and those actions resulted in violence and deaths in Andijon in May 2005. Following three terrorist bombings in Tashkent in July 2004, the Government took into custody several hundred persons; the overwhelming majority of detainees were identified as having belonged to HT or other so-called "Wahhabi" groups. Most of these were released after questioning, but approximately 115 were

convicted on terrorism-related charges. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of various Christian confessions, had difficulty satisfying the strict registration requirements set out by law. As in previous years, Protestant groups with ethnic Uzbek members reported operating in a climate of harassment and fear. Some registered groups experienced raids and harassment, including de-registration and closing of several groups. A small but growing number of “underground” mosques, such as those that were tolerated during the Soviet period, operated under the close scrutiny of religious authorities and security services. After the May 2005 violence in Andijon, the number of congregants at these mosques declined significantly.

Vietnam. Although there was some improvement in respect for religious freedom, the Government continued to restrict organized activities of religious groups that it declared to be at variance with state laws and policies. Despite the introduction of less restrictive legislation governing religion, the legal framework continued to require that the organization and activities of all religious denominations be officially sanctioned by the Government. Restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of religious groups remained in place. Oversight of recognized religions and harassment of followers of nonrecognized religions varied with the locality, often as a result of diverse local interpretations of national policy. There were reports that on several occasions, local officials pressured ethnic minority Protestants to recant their faith. According to reports, police arbitrarily detained and sometimes beat religious believers, particularly in the mountainous ethnic minority areas. At least 6 persons were in prison or detention for religious reasons, and at least 15 other persons were under various levels of restrictions on their activities.

STATE NEGLECT OF SOCIETAL DISCRIMINATION OR ABUSES AGAINST RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Some countries have legislation that discourages religious discrimination and persecution but fails to prevent conflicts, harassment, or other harmful acts against usually, but not necessarily, minority religious groups. Other countries do not respond with consistency and vigor to violations of religious freedom by private actors, nongovernmental entities, or local law enforcement officials.

Bangladesh. Citizens generally were free to practice the religion of their choice; however, police often were ineffective in upholding law and order and slow to assist members of religious minorities who were victims of crimes. Religiously motivated discrimination and violence—including killings, rapes, attacks on places of worship, and forced evictions—remained a problem. The period was marked with harassment and violent attacks against Ahmadis. The Government often failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators; in some instances, it appeared police aided crowds that were attacking Ahmadis. Village leaders continued to issue declarations and claim they were fatwas, often resulting in extrajudicial punishments of women for their perceived moral transgressions. Religious minorities remained underrepresented in most government jobs, especially at the higher levels of the civil and foreign services. Some foreign missionaries reported that internal security forces closely monitored their activities.

Egypt. Despite some improvement in the Government’s respect for religious freedom, there continued to be abuses and restrictions. Government discrimination against non-Muslims continued: Christians were discriminated against in the public sector and in staff appointments to public universities and were refused admission to Al-Azhar University, a publicly funded institution. Elements within the Government, often local administrative and security officials, impeded efforts by Christians to obtain permits required for construction or renovation of places of worship. The approval process for church construction continued to suffer time delays often measured in years. The state-sponsored National Council for Human Rights, established in January 2004, issued its first report in March 2005 but neglected to discuss religious freedom. The Government continued to deny civil documents, including identification cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to Baha’is. Persons accused of proselytizing have been harassed by police or arrested on charges of violating provisions in the Penal Code that prohibit ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.

India. At times, the Government did not act quickly enough to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by some leaders of state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This resulted in part from legal constraints on central government action inherent in the country’s federal structure and from shortcomings in the law enforcement and justice systems. Despite central government efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities as a signal

that they could commit such violence with impunity. Prospects for justice for victims of the 2002 Gujarat violence remained uncertain. "Hindutva," the ideology that espouses politicized inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms above other religious norms, continued to influence governmental policies and societal attitudes in some regions at the state and local level. Interreligious tensions between Muslims and Hindus and also between Hindus and Christians continued. Anti-conversion laws remained in effect in some states. In some regions, local officials selectively enforced laws to the detriment of religious minorities.

Sri Lanka. The status of religious freedom remained fragile. There was an increase in attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and also in societal tension, due to allegations of forced conversions and efforts to pass anti-conversion legislation. Some groups complained that authorities tacitly condoned harassment and violence, and in some cases, police were reluctant to take legal action against persons involved in attacks. In October 2004, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) party formally proposed a constitutional amendment to declare Buddhism the state religion, and in May 2005, the JHU presented a bill criminalizing conversions for its second reading to Parliament, despite the Supreme Court's ruling that some sections of the bill were unconstitutional. In April 2005, the Cabinet approved an anti-conversion bill, and in June, the bill was formally gazetted, the first step toward introducing it to Parliament. The Supreme Court ruled that sections of the proposed JHU bill would be unconstitutional; however, the sections that criminalize forced conversion were generally upheld. At the end of the period covered by this report, the proposed JHU bill remained under consideration in Parliament.

DISCRIMINATORY LEGISLATION OR POLICIES PREJUDICIAL TO CERTAIN RELIGIONS

Some governments have enacted legislation that favors majority religions and discriminates against minority religions. This often results from historical dominance by the majority religion and a bias against new or minority religions. In such countries, segments of the citizenry are often suspicious of new religions.

Azerbaijan. The Constitution provides that persons of all faiths may choose and practice their religion without restrictions; however, there were some abuses of that right. The Law on Religious Freedom, which the Government enforces, prohibits foreigners from proselytizing. Some religious groups reported delays in and denials of registration and limitations on their ability to import religious literature. In June 2004, authorities evicted a Muslim congregation from its mosque, citing the political activity of the community's imam as one of the reasons for the eviction. The mosque remained closed. Local authorities occasionally monitored religious services, and officials at times harassed nontraditional religious groups. Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials continued. In many instances, abuses reflected the popular antipathy towards ethnic Azeri converts to non-Russian Orthodox Christianity and other nontraditional religions.

Belarus. The Government continued to restrict religious freedom in accordance with the provisions of a 2002 law on religion and a 2003 concordat with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC). Although there is no state religion, the concordat grants the BOC privileged status. Authorities continued to harass certain religions and denominations, particularly those that the authorities appeared to regard as bearers of foreign cultural influence or suspected of having a political agenda. Protestants in particular appeared to attract negative attention for their perceived links with the United States. A 2002 law on religion required religious groups to re-register; however, authorities refused to re-register some minority groups, including some Protestant groups, Orthodox confessions outside of the BOC, and some Eastern religions. Without registration, many of these groups faced problems with authorities and found it difficult to function.

Brunei. Practitioners of non-Muslim faiths are not permitted to proselytize, and Christian-based schools are not allowed to teach Christianity. All schools must give instruction in the Islamic faith to all students. The Government uses municipal and planning laws and other legislation to restrict the expansion of any religion other than official Islam. The Government restricts the practice of non-Muslim faiths by 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 churches, temples, or shrines. Muslims who wish to change or renounce their religion face considerable difficulties. The dominant Islamic religious ethos discourages Muslims from learning about other faiths and forbids those of other faiths from proselytizing. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize activities to explain and propagate Islam and also offer financial incentives and housing for converts to Islam.

Indonesia. Security forces occasionally tolerated discrimination against and abuse of nonrecognized groups by private actors, and the Government at times failed to punish perpetrators. Ethnoreligious violence, exacerbated by economic tensions between predominantly non-Muslim local or native peoples and predominantly Muslim immigrants, occurred in the Moluccas, Central Sulawesi, Papua, and Kalimantan. The Government recognizes only five major religions, and persons of nonrecognized groups frequently experienced official discrimination, such as in the issuance of identity cards and the civil registration of marriages and births.

Israel and the Occupied Territories. The Israeli Declaration of Independence describes the country as a “Jewish state” but also provides for full social and political equality regardless of political affiliation. However, some non-Jews, primarily Arab Muslims and Christians, continued to experience discrimination in the areas of education, housing, and employment. The State continued to recognize only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning Jews. Tensions between Israeli Jews and Arab Muslims and Christians remained high due to the institutional, legal, and societal discrimination against the country’s Arab citizens. Building codes for places of worship were enforced selectively, based on religion. Government resources available for religious/heritage studies to Arab and to non-Orthodox Jewish public schools were proportionately less than those available to Orthodox Jewish ones. During Jewish holidays and following terrorist attacks, the Government imposed internal and external closures for security purposes that had the effect of restricting access to holy sites for Arab Muslims and Christians, as well as for Israeli Arabs and Palestinians who possessed Jerusalem identification cards. The construction of a separation barrier by the Israeli Government, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, severely limited access to mosques, churches, and other holy sites and impeded the work of religious organizations that provide education, health care, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians. Palestinian violence against Israeli settlers prevented some Israelis from reaching Jewish holy sites in the occupied territories, such as Joseph’s Tomb near Nablus and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Disagreements between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority continued over access to the Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount), containing the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Malaysia. Sunni Islam is the official religion, and the Government continued to place significant restrictions on the practice of non-Sunni Islamic beliefs. Muslims are not permitted to convert to another religion, and proselytizing of Muslims by followers of other religions is strictly prohibited. The Government restricted the distribution in peninsular Malaysia of Malay-language translations of the Bible, Christian tapes, and other printed materials. Due to concern that “deviationist” teachings could cause divisions among Muslims, the Government continued to monitor the activities of the Shi’a minority. Shi’a followers could be arrested and detained, with the consent of the Islamic court, in order to be “rehabilitated” and returned to the “true path of Islam.”

Pakistan. The Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam and imposes some elements of Islamic law on both Muslims and religious minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith fostered religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities. The Government took steps to improve the treatment of religious minorities, but there were instances in which authorities failed to intervene in cases of societal violence directed at minority religious groups. The Ahmadiyya religious minority continued to face legal bars to the practice of its faith. Members of certain Islamic schools of thought claimed governmental discrimination. Law enforcement personnel abused religious minorities in custody, leading to deaths in some cases. The abuse of the Hudood Ordinances and the blasphemy law continued. The government in the Northwest Frontier Province continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with the conservative Islamic vision of its supporters.

Russia. Although government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population, conditions deteriorated for some minority religious faiths. Some federal agencies and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law “On Freedom of Conscience and Associations” seriously disadvantaged many religious groups considered nontraditional. There were indications that security services, including the Federal Security Service, increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats. The courts maintained a 2004 ban on Jehovah’s Witnesses activities in Moscow; subsequently, members of Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout the country began to report problems in conducting activities or with rental contracts on buildings they used for

worship. Other religious groups reported similar problems with rented properties. Restitution of religious property seized by the former Communist government remained an issue. Muslims, the largest religious minority, continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas. Anti-Semitic incidents increased, as did the use of violence in such incidents. Reports of the harassment of evangelical and Pentecostal Christians also increased.

Turkey. There was some deterioration in respect for religious freedom, in contrast to previous positive trends. The Government's Directorate of Religious Affairs initiated a public campaign against Christian missionary activity. High-level government officials made statements depicting missionaries as a threat. There also was an increase in anti-Christian media coverage. Threats and vandalism against Christians and church facilities increased. In addition, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is faced restrictions and occasional harassment for alleged proselytizing or unauthorized meetings. Authorities continued their broad ban on wearing Muslim religious dress in government facilities, including universities, schools, and workplaces. Non-Muslims claimed they were effectively barred from careers in government institutions such as the armed forces and national police. The Government continued to deny requests to reopen the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli.

DENOUNCING CERTAIN RELIGIONS BY IDENTIFYING THEM AS DANGEROUS "CULTS" OR "SECTS"

Some Western European governments continued to use restrictive legislation and practices to brand minority religions as dangerous "cults" or "sects."

Belgium. A 1997 parliamentary commission list of 189 "harmful sectarian organizations," while lacking legal standing, was not retracted by the Government. In October 2004, the city of Brussels reneged on a contract with the Genealogical Society of Utah, declaring it did not wish to associate with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), an organization "on the parliamentary sects list." In January 2005, the Chair of the House of Representatives working group on sects urged the Foreign Minister to ensure that Church of Scientology workers had no access to tsunami relief funds sent by the country.

France. After being established in November 2002, an interministerial organization began to observe and analyze the movements of "sects" and "cults" that allegedly constitute a threat to public order or that violate French law. The organization also coordinated responses to abuses by cults, informed the public about potential risks, and helped victims to receive aid. The 2001 About-Picard law, which permits dissolution of cults, was used in November 2004 to convict Arnaud Mussy, founder of the group Neo-Phare, of fraudulently abusing the ignorance and weakness of his followers.

Germany. The Government continued to characterize some nontraditional religions as "sects." A 1995 Interior Ministry refusal to issue a visa to Unification Church founder Reverend Sun Myung Moon remained in force. A 10-year legal effort by the Jehovah's Witnesses to gain public law corporation status in Berlin remained unresolved, despite a court ruling ordering recognition. The Church of Scientology remained under scrutiny by both federal and state officials, who contended that its ideology is opposed to the democratic constitutional order. The Government continued to prohibit firms bidding on government training contracts from using technology associated with the Church of Scientology.

Part II: Significant Improvement in the Area of Religious Freedom

The International Religious Freedom Act prescribes that a section of the Executive Summary identify countries where "significant improvement in the protection and promotion" of religious freedom has occurred during the period covered by the report. Serious problems, however, may remain in these countries.

Georgia. In the wake of the 2003 "Rose Revolution," religious freedom improved in several important areas. Attacks on religious minorities, including violence, verbal harassment, and disruption of services and meetings, decreased. The Government arrested and sentenced to imprisonment excommunicated Orthodox priest Father Basil Mkalavishvili and several of his associates, who were primary instigators of religiously motivated violence. In April 2005, the Government passed a law enabling religious groups to register. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Seventh-day Adventists were registered under the new procedure in record time. The Government also passed a law on general education that partly improved regulation of religious freedom in schools. Local police were generally more responsive to the needs of minority believers, although at times they failed to adequately protect these groups.

India. The status of religious freedom improved in a number of ways. The Government demonstrated its commitment to a policy of religious inclusion at the highest levels of government and throughout society. The Government also took steps to address expeditiously the failures of the Gujarat State government to halt Hindu-Muslim riots there in 2002. Minority rights activists reported that instances of communal violence decreased as a result. The Government refused to approve the Gujarat Control of Organized Crime Act, passed by the Gujarat legislature in June 2004, and which Muslim groups feared would be used selectively against them. The Government repealed the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act, often criticized by Muslim groups as a tool used to target them, and replaced it with a law considered to be fairer to minorities. The Government also withdrew controversial school textbooks that had been condemned for espousing a Hindu nationalist agenda and replaced them with more moderate editions, although problems lingered in some states controlled by the opposition. The National Human Rights Commission intervened in legal battles surrounding the 2002 Gujarat riots, which resulted in the reopening of 2,000 cases. The commission also directed the Gujarat state government to entrust certain cases to the Central Bureau of Investigation, support NGOs working on behalf of religious minorities, and reform the police. No states passed new anti-conversion laws, and Tamil Nadu repealed its anti-conversion law.

Turkmenistan. While serious violations of religious freedom continued, the Government made progress in some areas. In March 2004, the President signed a decree pledging to register all religious groups, regardless of creed or number, and to adhere to generally accepted international norms and rules concerning treatment of religious minorities. Despite the onerous registration process and additional requirements for minority congregations to register and operate, five groups were registered in 2004 and an additional four were registered in 2005, bringing the total to nine minority religious groups. On April 16, 2005, four members of Jehovah's Witnesses serving prison sentences for conscientious objection to military service were amnestied. Unlike previous years, there were no confirmed reports of torture, but there was at least one report of a beating experienced by a woman detained for questioning in connection with practice of her faith. Furthermore, human rights observers widely reported that the Government replaced a number of Sunni Muslim imams, including the Mufti, with individuals believed to be less independent in their interpretations of Islam, in an attempt to better facilitate government control of mosques.

United Arab Emirates. The Government took several steps that demonstrated respect for religious freedom. In October 2004, the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf hosted an international conference on religion and terrorism that was designed to encourage moderation in preaching and condemn extremism and terrorism. Also in October, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed received the Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East. The Crown Prince stated that such visits foster friendship, tolerance, and religious dialogue. In late 2004, the Crown Prince of Dubai donated a plot of land to build St. Mary's church for the Greek Orthodox community in Dubai. In December 2004, the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf participated in the Christmas celebrations of the Arab Evangelical Church in Abu Dhabi. Both the Assistant Under Secretary for Mosque Affairs and the Assistant Under Secretary for Islamic Affairs attended the event and called for religious tolerance. In March 2005, the Minister received Elder Zwick of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to discuss means of enhancing relationships between people of different religions and to confirm the tolerance of Islam. In April 2005, the Minister of Education received Bishop Bernard G. Gremoli, ex-bishop of Abu Dhabi's Saint Joseph's Catholic Church, to whom the Minister conveyed his condolences on the demise of Pope John Paul II. In May 2005, the Government's Religious Adviser unveiled the foundation stone of the Egyptian Coptic Church of the Reverent Antonios, accompanied by the Archbishop of the Orthodox Coptic Church in Jerusalem, the Gulf, and the Middle East. In June 2005, President Khalifa issued a law establishing the Zayed Center for Islamic Culture to foster interreligious tolerance and co-existence and to promote a better understanding of Islam in the West.

Vietnam. The Government made significant revisions to the legal framework governing religion. While maintaining close government oversight of religious organizations, the November 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief relaxed control of religious activities and the promotion and transfer of clerics, and it allowed religious organizations to conduct charitable activities in education and healthcare, which had been highly restricted in the past. In February 2005, the Prime Minister issued instructions that urged government officials to cooperate with Protestant believers, assist unrecognized religious groups to register, and allow nonrecognized "house churches" to operate if they committed to follow regulations. A March 2005 imple-

menting decree stated that forcing others to renounce their faith is illegal and set forth procedures for religious organizations to register; these procedures had previously been left to the discretion of local officials. The Government released or granted amnesty to a number of religious prisoners. Many of the hundreds of Protestant house churches in the Central Highlands that had been ordered to shut down in 2001 have been able quietly to resume activity, although most have not yet sought or received official registration.

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

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

Azerbaijan. Embassy representatives conveyed U.S. Government concerns about the registration process and the overall attitude towards nontraditional religious groups to the Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations and expressed concerns about the Government's commitment to religious freedom with others in the Government and also to the press. Embassy officers also repeatedly expressed objections to the censorship of religious literature. The Embassy closely monitored the court case against the Juma Mosque community and met with government and religious leaders to urge respect for religious freedom. In October 2004, a representative of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom visited Baku and advocated respect for religious freedom in meetings with an official from the Caucasus Muslim Board and senior government officials.

Bangladesh. Due to renewed attacks on Ahmadis, the U.S. Government continued to make religious freedom a central point in meetings with the Prime Minister and other ministers. The Embassy expressed its views to the media and in public forums related to democracy and governance. The State Department's Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs and the U.S. Ambassador visited Ahmadiyya headquarters to show support for the security and religious freedom of Ahmadis. In March 2005, Embassy representatives expressed concerns over legislation that would have created a blasphemy law based on the Pakistani model. The Embassy encouraged the Government to develop and expand its training program for Islamic religious leaders. After an initial pilot program, USAID provided educational material on human rights, HIV/AIDS, gender equality, and trafficking in persons to be used in courses for religious leaders.

Belarus. During meetings with government officials and ministers, Embassy representatives raised such issues as the 2002 religion law, the continued sale of intolerant literature at locations affiliated with the Government and the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), and registration denials of certain religious communities. Embassy officers also raised the issue of government passivity in the face of intolerant acts and attempts to preserve the religious status quo through discriminatory action. The Embassy monitored the continued sale of anti-Semitic and xenophobic literature at stores and events linked with the BOC and state media distributors. On several occasions, Embassy representatives also visited the site of a Jewish cemetery in Grodno and met with local officials and community leaders to discuss their agreement for reburial of human remains uncovered during a construction project.

Burma. The Secretary of State again designated Burma as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom, and the U.S. Government continued to impose extensive sanctions on the regime. The U.S. Government promoted religious freedom with all facets of society, including government officials, religious leaders, private citizens, scholars, diplomats or other governments, and international business and media representatives. The Embassy emphasized religious tolerance by hosting interfaith workshops and discussions with visiting speakers. Embassy representatives offered support to local organizations and religious leaders and acted as a conduit for exchanging information with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders.

China. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China as a "Country of Particular Concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. President Bush raised religious freedom in his November 2004 meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao at the APEC summit, and the Secretary of State discussed religious freedom and attended a church service during her March 2005 visit to Beijing. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor traveled to the country twice to discuss human rights and religious freedom with the Government. Other State Department representatives also traveled to the country to discuss religious freedom problems. U.S. officials protested vigorously whenever there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and they requested information in cases of alleged

mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. The Embassy raised reported cases of detention and abuse of religious practitioners with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Administration of Religious Affairs, except from March through November 2004, when, in response to U.S. sponsorship of a resolution on Chinese human rights at the March 2004 session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the Government unilaterally implemented a policy of refusing to discuss such cases. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within the country's religious communities, including bishops, priests, and ministers of the official Protestant and Catholic churches; Taoist, Muslim, and Buddhist leaders; and leaders and members of the unofficial Christian churches. The Department of State brought a number of Chinese religious leaders and scholars to the United States on International Visitor Programs to observe the role that religion plays in U.S. society. The Embassy also brought experts on religion from the United States to speak about the role of religion in American life and public policy.

Egypt. The subject of religious freedom was raised with senior government officials by several levels of the U.S. Government, including by the Secretary of State, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, the Ambassador, and other Embassy officials. Embassy representatives discussed religious freedom issues regularly with governors and Members of Parliament. The Embassy raised its concerns about official discrimination against Baha'is and unofficial discrimination against Christians. Visiting U.S. congressional delegations also raised religious freedom issues during meetings with government officials. Officials from the Embassy and USAID actively challenged anti-Semitic articles in the media through discussions with editors-in-chief and other journalists. The Mission, including the Department of State and USAID, continued to work to expand human rights and ameliorate the conditions that contribute to religious strife by promoting economic, social, and political development. U.S. programs and activities supported initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom, including funding for programs that work with Coptic community groups in upper Egypt. An interagency grant supported projects to promote tolerance and mutual respect between different religious communities. The Mission also continued to promote the development of curriculum materials in Arabic and English that encourage religious tolerance, diversity, and understanding. USAID worked with the Supreme Council of Antiquities to promote the conservation of cultural antiquities, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish historical sites.

Eritrea. In September 2004, the Secretary of State designated Eritrea as a "Country of Particular Concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom pressed senior Eritrean officials to release religious prisoners and permit closed churches to reopen. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy representatives raised the cases of detentions and restrictions on unregistered religious groups with officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and leaders of the sole legal political party. Embassy officials were able to meet for the first time since 2002 with the Government's Director for the Office of Religious Affairs. They also met regularly with leaders of the religious community.

Georgia. The U.S. Government repeatedly raised its concerns with senior government officials, including the President, regarding harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities. Embassy officials met with Members of Parliament to encourage legislation allowing for registration of religious groups. Embassy officials encouraged religious minority groups to support the efforts of the State Ombudsman concerning religious freedom by participating in his roundtables and new initiatives. Embassy representatives attended the trial of defrocked Orthodox Priest Basil Mkalavishvili. In April 2005, the Ambassador showed support for local Jewish communities by attending a reception conducted by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In May 2005, the Ambassador participated in the reopening of a Baptist church in Akhalsopeli burned down by arsonists in 2003, and in June, the Ambassador attended the opening of the Baptist Beteli Social Center in Tbilisi.

India. The Department of State authorized a consular officer to find that a senior state-level official was ineligible for a visa under section 212 (a)(2)(G) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, which makes ineligible any foreign government official who "was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom". In the particular case concerned, the finding led to revocation of the official's business/visitor visa. U.S. officials engaged Gujarat State authorities on the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion laws. Consulate officers met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other representatives, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the violence in Gujarat. In October 2004, the Consulate in Chennai organized roundtables to pro-

mote better understanding between the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities. The Chennai Consulate continued to provide English instruction to underprivileged Muslim children; donate books to madrassahs in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Bangalore; and sponsor Muslims for International Visitor Programs. Embassy and Consulate officials celebrated Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals with members of the various religious communities. The Embassy expanded the Urdu and Hindi editions of SPAN magazine, exploring issues such as human rights, conflict resolution, and inclusiveness toward women and minorities.

Indonesia. The U.S. Embassy arranged eight speaking tours throughout the country for U.S. scholars to address religious tolerance and human rights, including a team from Hartford Seminary that spoke at pesantren and universities in Lombok and Yogyakarta on interfaith dialogue. Universitas Islam Negeri and the Liberal Islam Network each received a grant to survey attitudes toward religious practice and extremism and determine if they correlated with public opinion critical of the United States and its policies. The Embassy sponsored more than 76 religious scholars and leaders, community and youth leaders, students, human rights activists, and journalists to travel to the United States and participate in programs related to religious freedom. In addition, the Embassy sent more than 55 pesantren leaders to the United States on an exchange program focused on religious tolerance and civic education. In 2004, 38 students and teachers from private boarding schools attended an international youth leadership program on religious diversity, leadership, and civic education. More than 60 Muslim students were spending a year at high schools throughout the United States. The Embassy and the American-Indonesian Exchange Foundation continued to support the country's first graduate-level comparative religion program at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. Six English Language Fellows were based in Islamic institutions of higher education. Ten institutions of higher education, five of which are Islamic universities, have established American Corners, which are program and information centers that provide computers with Internet access and reference materials about American life, including religious topics, and venues for discussion with Embassy representatives and Embassy-sponsored speakers about religious pluralism. The State Department provided grants to two U.S. universities to support conflict resolution and training exchanges and establish five mediation centers in Islamic institutions of higher learning. During Ramadan, the Embassy made extensive use of the media to convey American respect for Islam, the role of tolerance in a democracy, and shared Indonesian-U.S. values, including an original television documentary series that consisted of 30 3-minute stories on topics concerning Islam in America and profiles of Muslims in the United States. The production was a joint project of the State Department and Cakrawala Andalas Televisi (ANTV), one of the country's oldest national television networks.

Iran. The Secretary of State again designated Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The United States has no diplomatic relations with the country and thus cannot raise directly the restrictions the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses that it commits against adherents of minority religions. The U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and reports, support for relevant U.N. and NGO efforts, and diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to government abuses. On numerous occasions, the State Department spokesman has addressed the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities. The U.S. Government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements and has urged them to raise the issue of religious freedom in discussions with the Government.

Iraq. U.S. officials at all levels, including the Secretary of State, members of Congress, the Ambassador, and Embassy officers, regularly engaged the Government on problems relating to freedom of religion. The Embassy facilitated interfaith discussion by hosting meetings, roundtables, and other events with all religious communities, and it funded training, seminars, conferences, and exchange programs to promote religious understanding and tolerance. The Embassy's primary focus was on the prevention of sectarian violence, Sunni and non-Muslim inclusion in the political and constitutional development processes, and interfaith understanding. USAID worked to increase Sunni inclusion in the political process by providing technical assistance to Sunni leaders. USAID worked with religious minorities by bringing together members of different religious and ethnic backgrounds to discuss common issues. USAID also conducted a significant amount of conflict mitigation at the local level through its Community Action Program. At the request of leading Shi'a and Sunni clerics, the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) funded the establishment of an interfaith dialogue center to help unite religious groups against violence and foster

an environment of tolerance, particularly between Sunni and Shi'a, as well as towards Christians and others. USIP held workshops for students at the University of Kirkuk and intercommunal conflict management programs for political and civil society representatives in Baghdad. Awareness workshops on intercommunal tolerance for Shi'a and Sunni mothers and schoolteachers in Baghdad were implemented.

Israel. U.S. Embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, met with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze leaders at various levels. In April 2005, the Embassy invited two Knesset members from the secular Shinui party and two from the ultra-Orthodox Shas party to participate together in an International Visitors Program on the U.S. legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government. In October 2004, a representative from the Office of International Religious Freedom visited Israel and met with government officials, Jewish religious leaders, civil rights NGO representatives, Israeli-Arab human rights advocates, and Christian clergy and religious workers—particularly those negatively affected by construction of the separation barrier. In November 2004, the Embassy hosted an Iftar to commemorate the Muslim holiday of Ramadan, inviting more than 80 Israeli Muslim representatives from the political, economic, legal, religious, and business communities as well as representatives of interfaith organizations. The Embassy provided grants to local organizations promoting interfaith dialogue and coexistence and to organizations examining the role of religion in resolving conflict. The Embassy also provided a grant to support a program for a dozen Palestinian youths and 20 Israeli-Jewish and Israeli-Arab youths to hold an October dialogue/retreat on Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Youth Leadership. Embassy representatives attended and spoke at NGO meetings, including the Arab Association for Human Rights, the Mossawa Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Israel Religious Action Center, and Adalah.

Laos. The U.S. Ambassador raised the issue of religious freedom with senior figures in the Government and also spoke directly about religious freedom with provincial governors in her visits to the provinces. The Embassy informed Department of Religious Affairs officials of specific cases of arrest or harassment, who in turn used this information to intercede with local authorities. For the second year, the Government co-hosted with the Embassy a seminar on religious freedom issues aimed at senior district and provincial administrators as well as officials from the central Government. The Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs raised religious freedom with senior officials during his visit. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor also visited and met with senior government officials to discuss religious freedom and other human rights. The Embassy continued to support the visit of the president of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), an NGO devoted to promoting religious freedom.

Nigeria. The U.S. Government sought to encourage a peaceful resolution of the question regarding Shari'a criminal penalties in a manner compatible with international human rights norms and urged that human rights and religious freedom be respected in all instances. The U.S. Mission hosted Iftars in Abuja, Lagos, and the predominantly Muslim Kwara State. The Mission reached out to Muslim communities through the International Visitor Program, the American Speaker Program, the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program, the Humphrey Fellowship Program, and programs organized by the Office of Citizen Exchanges. The Mission also continued publishing its informational magazine in Hausa, the language of the predominantly Muslim north. In September 2004, USAID concluded a 3-year project to improve literacy and numeracy at the primary school level in public and Islamic schools in 3 of the country's 36 states. The program reached more than 120,000 students and 4,000 teachers, and it involved Islamic leaders as well as federal, state, and local government officials. In December 2004, the Embassy presented scholarships to students in the Muslim heartlands of Kano and Zaria to improve literacy and numeracy. In accepting the awards, school officials declared that the inclusive process of selecting the students sowed a seed of respect for diversity and tolerance for religious differences.

North Korea. The Secretary of State again designated the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) as a "Country of Particular Concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the DPRK; however, it continued to raise religious freedom concerns about the country in multilateral forums and bilaterally with other governments. U.S. officials urged other countries to condition their bilateral relations with the country on concrete, verifiable, and sustained improvements. In response to serious concerns over the country's human rights record, the U.S. Congress enacted the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004. The act establishes the position of Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea to coordinate and promote efforts to improve respect for the fundamental human rights of the people of the country. At the

61st session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the U.S. Government co-sponsored a resolution condemning the regime for its human rights record. The resolution called on the Government to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments to which it is a party and ensure that humanitarian organizations and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK have free access to the country. In 2004, the Department of State provided the National Endowment for Democracy with a \$350,000 grant to improve and expand monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions in the country. The Department of State also provided a grant to Freedom House for a series of conferences and other activities dedicated to pressuring the regime to end its abuses. Radio Free Asia provides regular Korean-language broadcasting. U.S. Government 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.

Pakistan. The U.S. Embassy continued to raise concerns with the Government, Members of Parliament, and other officials about the abusive and excessively harsh implementation of the blasphemy laws and Hudood Ordinances. Embassy officials monitored madrassah reform, and the Ambassador and other U.S. Government representatives discussed reforms with the Religious Affairs Minister and the Minister of Education. The Embassy urged reconciliation with the Ahmadiyya community and an end to abuses committed against the group. Embassy officials also met with religious and political leaders of major Islamic groups to call for an end to sectarian violence. The Embassy encouraged interfaith dialogue initiatives, such as the World Council of Religions, and supported the annual American Studies conference organized by the Quaid-i-Azam University, among other programs, to promote religious tolerance and better understanding of religion in the United States.

Russia. The U.S. Embassy and Consulates worked to encourage the development of programs designed to sensitize law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. The Consul General in Yekaterinburg hosted Iftars for Muslims in three Ural cities to celebrate Ramadan, and Consulate officials visited mosques and madrassahs. Two American speakers on Islamic issues visited six major Ural cities, and an exhibit featuring U.S. mosque architecture was displayed in seven cities. In June–July 2004, the Embassy and Consulate General Yekaterinburg coordinated and funded a summer camp for 70 children from the predominantly Muslim city of Ufa, Bashkortostan. The camp promoted English language and leadership skills, an understanding of American culture, and interethnic tolerance. In September 2004, the Consulate General in Yekaterinburg sent a group of 10 primarily Muslim community and religious leaders from the Urals to the United States on a program entitled “Promoting Multiculturalism in Civic Life.” Subsequently, one participant, a television producer, devoted an episode of her television show *Islam Today* to religious freedom in the United States and, with another participant, founded the Interethnic Information Center to follow media coverage of ethnic and religious minorities and educate journalists and government officials on tolerance issues. USAID continued to form and strengthen regional tolerance councils in Kazan, Ryazan, and Leningrad Oblast. USAID supported tolerance projects in Perm and Nizhniy Novgorod; one direct result of the project in Nizhniy Novgorod was further refining of the proposal to change federal legislation concerning the regulation of religion that was submitted to the Committee on Religious Affairs of the State Duma. Tatarstan’s regional Ministry of Education signed an agreement to include tolerance courses in education programs for school teachers. In April 2005, members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission held a hearing in Washington on unregistered religious groups in Russia.

Saudi Arabia. The U.S. Government continued its policy to press the Government to honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, and promote tolerance toward non-Muslims. In 2004, the Secretary of State designated Saudi Arabia as a “Country of Particular Concern” for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Ambassador discussed U.S. concerns over the lack of religious freedom with a wide range of senior government and religious leaders.

Sudan. The Secretary of State again designated Sudan as a “Country of Particular Concern” for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Embassy representatives continued to stress that progress on religious freedom was vital to improving the country’s relationship with the United States. U.S. efforts to bring about peace in the country focused, among other things, on promoting religious dialogue through the Sudan Inter-Religious Council and the Sudan Council of Churches. Embassy officials discussed with government authorities possible benchmarks to be used to judge improvement in human rights, including religious freedom, for the eventual relaxing or lifting of economic sanctions.

Turkey. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy representatives met frequently with government officials and representatives of religious groups to discuss legal reform aimed at lifting restrictions on religious minorities. The Embassy continued to urge the Government to enable the reopening of the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island. In December 2004, the Archons of the Order of St. Andrew, an American group that actively supports the Ecumenical Patriarchate, visited Istanbul and Ankara with the support of the Mission. The Ambassador accompanied the Archons to a meeting with Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul to encourage an agreement on the reopening of Halki and a resolution of the issue of properties seized by the Government from religious minority communities. In June 2005, President Bush met with Prime Minister Erdogan and discussed the importance of maintaining the tradition of religious freedom, including urging the reopening of Halki. The Embassy and Consulates hosted Iftars and met regularly with representatives of various religious groups to discuss the Government's anti-missionary campaign, problems faced by "non-Muslim" groups, and the debate over the role of Islam.

Turkmenistan. The U.S. Embassy continued to urge the Government to take steps necessary to improve respect for freedom of religion. A visit in October 2004 by a representative of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, who met with Government officials and members of faith groups, underscored the importance of the issue to the U.S. Government. In early March 2005, the Counsel of the U.S. Helsinki Commission delivered to the Foreign Minister and the Acting Minister of Justice specific points of concern that the Government needed to address. U.S. Embassy representatives continued to encourage the Government to explain to local authorities—and encourage implementation of—presidential decrees and the laws passed in March 2004. The Ambassador and Embassy officers raised specific reports of abuse and urged greater respect for religious freedom in meetings with the Foreign Minister and other government officials. Embassy officials also requested that the Government assist registered religious groups in finding places to hold services. In November 2004, the Ambassador held an Iftar during Ramadan to promote religious tolerance; members of the Council for Religious Affairs, including the Mufti, attended. The Ambassador and Embassy representatives met regularly with the staff of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Center in Ashgabat and also with other diplomatic missions to maximize cooperation in monitoring abuses of and promoting greater respect for religious freedom.

Uzbekistan. U.S. Embassy officials repeatedly urged the Government to allow more freedom of religious expression and permit more mosques to be registered. U.S. officials, both in Washington and in Tashkent, encouraged the Government to revise its laws on religion, including repealing the ban on proselytizing, lifting restrictions on the import and publication of religious literature, and eliminating legal provisions prohibiting the private teaching of religion. The Embassy continued to intervene on behalf of religious groups, including Muslims, Baptists, Grace Church in Samarkand, Jehovah's Witnesses, and several faith-based foreign aid organizations. All but 2 of approximately 50 Jehovah's Witnesses detained in Tashkent's Chilonzor District in March 2005 were released within hours, a result they credited to the Embassy. The U.S. Government continued to sponsor exchange and educational programs designed to promote religious tolerance and expand religious freedom. In September 2004, through the U.S. International Visitors Program, the deputy mufti and head imams from Samarqand and Surkhondarya visited the United States to view the role that religious organizations play in American society and the separation of religion and state. The Community Connections and Cultural and Religious Pluralism projects brought 70 local Islamic leaders to the United States, exposing them to the diversity of U.S. religious practices. In April 2005, Embassy officials met with Cultural and Religious Pluralism alumni at Kok Gumbaz mosque in Qarshi, where religious leaders shared impressions of their visit to the United States. A 3-year comparative religious studies program, funded by the Embassy and managed by the University of Washington, provides for exchange of experts and professors from five local universities.

Vietnam. In September 2004, the Secretary of State designated Vietnam as a "Country of Particular Concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, and other high-level U.S. officials and Embassy representatives conducted discussions with the Government to urge improvements in religious freedom. On May 5, 2005, the United States and Vietnam concluded an agreement that addresses a number of important religious freedom concerns. Under the agreement, Vietnam made a number of commitments including: to fully implement the new laws on religious activities and to render previous contradictory regulations obsolete, to instruct local authorities to adhere strictly and completely to the new legislation and ensure their compliance, to facilitate the process by which congrega-

tions are able to open houses of worship, and to give special consideration to prisoners and cases of concern raised by the United States during the granting of prisoner amnesties. In May 2005, the Deputy Secretary of State discussed human rights, including religious freedom, with high-level government officials during his visit. In June 2005, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Vietnam discussed the status of religious freedom in the country. The Ambassador and other Mission officers urged recognition of a broad spectrum of religious groups, including the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, the Protestant house churches, and dissenting Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. They urged greater freedom for recognized religious groups and repeatedly advocated ending restrictions on Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do, among others. Along with Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Mission representatives continued to urge an end to forced renunciations, punishment of officials involved, and registration and reopening of house churches that had been closed.

AFRICA

ANGOLA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 481,351 square miles, and its population is approximately 13 million. Christianity is the religion of the vast majority of the population, with Roman Catholicism as the largest single denomination. The Roman Catholic Church claims 5 million adherents, but this figure cannot be verified. The major Protestant denominations also are present, along with a number of Brazilian and indigenous African Christian denominations. The largest Protestant denominations, which include Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists (United Church of Christ), and Assemblies of God, claim to have 3 to 5 million adherents. The largest syncretic religious group is the Kimbanguist Church, whose followers believe that mid-20th century Congolese pastor Joseph Kimbangu was a prophet. A small portion of the rural population practices animism or traditional indigenous religions. There is also a small Islamic community, less than 1 percent of the population, mainly comprised of migrants from West Africa and families of Lebanese extraction. There are few declared atheists in the country.

Foreign-based missionaries operate freely throughout 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 Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministries of Justice and Culture; groups must provide general background information to register. In March 2004, the National Assembly unanimously approved a law establishing stricter criteria for the registration of religious groups. According to the new law, a religious group must have at least 100,000 adult adherents to qualify for registration. All 85 previously registered groups retain their registration and juridical status, regardless of the current number of members. At the end of the period covered by this report, two groups had pending applications. The Government did not shut down any religious groups during the period covered by this report.

The Ministries of Justice and Culture currently recognize 85 denominations. There reportedly are more than 800 other religious organizations, many of which are Congolese- or Brazilian-based Christian evangelical organizations that have not had action taken on their registration applications. Colonial-era statutes banned all non-Christian religious groups from the country; although those statutes have not been repealed, they no longer are enforced. Religious groups have the right to civil registration.

The Government permits religious organizations and missions to establish and operate schools. Some members of the small Lebanese Muslim community in Luanda

complain that they have been thwarted in efforts to establish an Islamic community school.

The country's religious leaders have taken an active role in promoting the peace and national reconciliation process, and President dos Santos has consulted with them on constitutional and electoral issues as well as social and development issues.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In March 2004, the Minister of Justice again publicly warned that the colonial-era law banning non-Christian religions, while not regularly enforced, remained the law and could be enforced against any radical religious groups advocating terrorism or public disturbances. Several local Muslims have complained that the Ministry of Justice has hampered their efforts to form an Islamic Association.

Members of the clergy regularly use their pulpits to criticize government policies. In 2003, government officials sharply criticized Catholic Church-owned Radio Ecclesia's call-in programs in which participants criticized the Government. However, Radio Ecclesia continued to host the programs. In May 2004, President dos Santos stated publicly that Radio Ecclesia could operate nationwide. In April 2005, Radio Ecclesia's operators began taking steps to broadcast from five provincial capitals in addition to Luanda; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, Radio Ecclesia had not been permitted to broadcast nationwide via a network of repeaters.

During the period covered by this report, 17 religious groups remained banned in Cabinda on charges of practicing medicine without a license on the groups' members, illegally holding religious services in residences, and not being registered. In March 2005, several lay members of the Catholic Church in Cabinda displayed banners protesting the nomination of a non-Cabindan as bishop during an Easter season Mass celebrated by the Archbishop of Luanda. Police did not interfere with the peaceful protest but stepped in to protect the Archbishop when protesters threw rocks at him as he left the cathedral in Cabinda.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There is a functioning ecumenical movement, particularly in support of post-conflict peace and reconciliation efforts. Groups involved include the ecumenical Inter-Church Committee for Peace in Angola, the Council of Christian Churches in Angola, and the Catholic Pro-Peace movement.

There also was continuing hostility against traditional religions that involve shamans, employ animal sacrifices, or are identified as practicing witchcraft. There have been reports of children being accused of witchcraft in some poor, rural areas and smaller cities. In some instances, these accusations have led to neglect, abuse, injury, or death. Established church groups have organized education campaigns to combat these practices. Legal authorities have arrested and prosecuted those who have abused, injured, or killed others accused of witchcraft.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials, and official visitors from the United States, routinely meet with the country's religious leaders in the context of peacekeeping, democratization, development, and humanitarian relief efforts. Church groups are key members of the country's civil society movement. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, maintained an ongoing dialogue with the leadership of the country's religious denominations.

The U.S. Government provided financial support to Radio Ecclesia to increase its public affairs and news programming as an independent alternative source of infor-

mation for citizens. In addition, the Embassy funded dissemination of human and civil rights information through an ecumenical newsletter network.

BENIN

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 43,483 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.8 million. According to the 2002 census, the self-identified religious affiliation of the population is reported as 27.1 percent Roman Catholic, 24.4 percent Muslim, 17.3 percent Vodun, 5 percent Celestial Christian, 3.2 percent Methodist, 5.3 percent other Christian, 2.2 percent other Protestant, 6 percent other traditional religions, 1.9 percent other religions, and 6.5 percent no religious affiliation.

Many individuals who nominally identify themselves as Christian or Muslim also practice traditional indigenous religions. Among the most commonly practiced is the animist "Vodun" system of belief, also commonly known as voodoo, which originated in this area of Africa. Almost all citizens appear to believe in a supernatural order. There are few atheists.

More than half of all Christians are Roman Catholic. Other religious groups, both Christian and non-Christian, include Baptists, Methodists, Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Celestial Christians, Rosicrucians, the Unification Church, Eckankar, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'is. Nearly all Muslims adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. The few Shi'a Muslims are primarily Middle Eastern expatriates.

There are Christians, Muslims, and adherents of traditional indigenous religions throughout the country. However, most adherents of the traditional Yoruba religion are in the south, while other indigenous faiths are followed in the north. Muslims are represented most heavily in the north and in the southeast. Christians are prevalent in the south, particularly in Cotonou, the economic capital. It is not unusual for members of the same family to practice Christianity, Islam, traditional indigenous religions, or a combination of all of these.

Foreign missionary groups known to be operating in the country include the Watchtower Society, Mormons, Assemblies of God, Mennonites, Church of the Nazarene, Adventists, Society in Mission, Wycliffe Bible Translators, and Baptists.

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-sponsored religion.

The Constitutional Court has ruled in several cases that it is unconstitutional to block the access of any group to its religious services.

In November 2004, the Court ruled that religious groups could not deny access to public properties or facilities to other groups because such denial of access violated the constitutional principle of secularism. In this case, the Chief Priest of a Vodun group had tried to claim possession of a lake as religious property and refused other groups, including evangelical Christians, access to it.

In 2003, the Constitutional Court upheld a Defense Ministry decision permitting its gendarmes to intervene in conflicts between religious groups only as a neutral peacekeeping force. Any intervention needed to be neutral to comply with the principle of state neutrality in the management of religious affairs while ensuring public order and social peace.

In 2003, the Constitutional Court ruled that simple discussions on religion, even when they turn into mockery, cannot be deemed to be violations of religious freedom, because of the right of free speech.

Persons who wish to form a religious group must register with the Ministry of the Interior. Registration requirements are the same for all religious groups, and there were no reports that any group had been refused permission to register or had been subjected to unusual delays or obstacles in the registration process. Religious groups are free from taxation.

Government officials accord respect to prominent religious leaders of all faiths by attending their induction ceremonies, funerals, and other religious celebrations. The President regularly received religious leaders of all faiths, and police forces are assigned to provide security to any religious event upon request.

Missionary groups operate freely throughout the country.

In accordance with Article 2 of the Constitution, which provides for a secular state, public schools are not authorized to provide religious instruction. Religious groups are permitted to establish private schools.

National holidays include the Christian holy days of Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, and Christmas; the Muslim holy days of Ramadan, Tabaski, and the Prophet Muhammed's birthday; and the indigenous celebration of Traditional Religions holiday. State-run television features coverage of the celebration of religious holidays and special events in the lives of prominent religious leaders, including ordination anniversaries and funerals.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Due possibly to the diversity of religious affiliations within families and communities, religious tolerance was widespread at all levels of society and in all regions. Interfaith dialogue occurred regularly, and citizens respected different religious traditions and practices, including syncretistic beliefs. Many Vodun followers also are Christian and Muslim and tolerant of other religions.

Ecumenical Day has been celebrated every first Wednesday of May for the past 36 years and traditionally includes a large celebration of inter-religious cooperation in the historic town of Ouidah. Individual religious leaders make an effort to bridge the divide between Christians and Muslims and preach a message of tolerance.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other Embassy representatives regularly attend ceremonies associated with various faiths, often attended by government representatives as well, and stress in their public remarks the value and importance of inter-faith dialogue and cooperation. These events include Iftars during Ramadan, Vodun ceremonies, and evangelical- and Catholic-sponsored events.

BOTSWANA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 224,710 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.76 million. An estimated 70 percent of the country's citizens identify themselves as Christians. Anglicans, Methodists, and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, formerly the London Missionary Society, claim the majority of Christians. There also are congregations of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, the Dutch Reformed Church, Mennonites, and other Christian denominations. In recent years, the number of new religious groups, some of West African origin, has increased; these churches have begun holding services and drawing substantial crowds with a charismatic blend of Christianity and traditional indigenous religions. According to the most recent census (2001), the Muslim community, primarily of South Asian origin, numbers just over 5,000. The 2001 census also listed roughly 3,000 Hindus and 700 Baha'is. Members of both of these communities claimed that these figures significantly understated their numbers. Approximately 20 percent of citizens espoused no religion.

Religious services are well attended in both rural and urban areas.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Quakers, Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, Mennonites, and a number of independent evangelical and charismatic Christian groups.

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. The Constitution also provides for the protection of the rights and freedoms of other persons, including the right to observe and practice any religion without the unsolicited intervention of members of any other religion.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register with the Government. To register, a group submits its constitution to the Registrar of Societies within the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. After a generally simple but slow bureaucratic process, the organization is registered. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations, although an organization must be registered before it can conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account in a local bank. Unregistered groups potentially are liable to penalties including fines up to \$100 (500 pula), up to 3 years in jail, or both. Thirteen religious organizations registered from July 2004 to April 2005. Unlike during the previous 12-month period, no religious organization was de-registered during the period covered by this report. During this time, 368 religious groups started the process of registration, but the Government terminated their applications after they failed to submit the required application forms, constitution, and fees within 90 days.

Religious education, with a primary emphasis on Christianity but which also addresses other religions in the country, is part of the curriculum in public schools. The Constitution provides that every religious community may establish places for religious instruction at the community's expense. The Constitution prohibits forced religious instruction, forced participation in religious ceremonies, or compulsory taking of oaths that run counter to an individual's religious beliefs.

There are no laws against proselytizing.

Only Christian holy days are recognized as public holidays. These include Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas Day. However, members of other religious groups are allowed to commemorate their religious holy days without government interference.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution provides for the suspension of religious freedom in the interests of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health. However, any suspension of religious freedom by the Government must be deemed "reasonably justifiable in a democratic society."

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. An interfaith council exists, which includes representatives of Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Baha'i organizations.

In December 2004, a minor controversy emerged over allegations that some stores' practice of buying halal products, particularly chickens, unfairly favored Muslim citizens at the expense of others. Newspapers featured a number of op-eds variously criticizing and defending halal. In the wake of these articles, graffiti denouncing halal appeared in some locations. The Botswana Muslim Association also publicly expressed concern about instances of Islamophobia in the local media, but its leaders maintained that, in general, Muslims did not suffer from discrimination or antagonistic attitudes.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives maintain regular contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador met with a range of religious leadership. The Embassy continued efforts to reach out to Islamic leaders to expand a dialogue on Islam between Americans and citizens of the country and continued developing relationships with influential Muslims in the community. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy expanded its interactions with faith-based organizations to promote the rights and welfare of women and young persons, care for orphans, and combat poverty by supporting income-generating activities.

BURKINA FASO

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 105,689 square miles, and its population is approximately 12.8 million. There is no single dominant religion. Exact statistics on religious affiliation are not available; however, the Government estimates that approximately 55 to 60 percent of the population practices Islam, approximately 16 to 20 percent practices Roman Catholicism, approximately 5 percent are members of various Protestant denominations, and 23 to 25 percent exclusively or principally practice traditional indigenous religions. Statistics on religious affiliation are approximate because syncretistic beliefs and practices are widespread among both Christians and Muslims. A majority of citizens practice traditional indigenous religions to varying degrees, and adherence to Christian and Muslim beliefs is often nominal. Almost all citizens are believers in a supernatural order, and atheism is virtually nonexistent. The large majority of the country's Muslims belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, while minorities adhere to the Shi'a, Tidjania, or Wahhabi branches.

Muslims are concentrated largely around the northern, eastern, and western borders, while Christians are concentrated in the center of the country. Traditional in-

digenous religions are practiced widely throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, has a mixed Muslim and Christian population. Bobo-Dioulasso, the country's second largest city, is mostly Muslim. There is a small Syrian and Lebanese immigrant community, whose members are overwhelmingly (more than 90 percent) Christian.

Members of the dominant ethnic group, the Mossi, belong to all three major religions. Fulani and Dioula groups overwhelmingly are Muslim. There is little correlation between religion and political affiliation or economic status. Religious affiliation appears unrelated to membership in the ruling party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress, or any other political party. Government officials belong to all of the major religions.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country and include the Assemblies of God, the Campus Crusade for Christ, the Christian Missionary Alliance, Baptists, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, the Mennonite Central Committee, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Pentecostal Church of Canada, the World Evangelical Crusade, the Society for International Missions, Seventh-day Adventists, and numerous Roman Catholic organizations. Islamic missionary groups active in the country include the African Muslim Agency, the World Movement for the Call to Islam, the World Islamic League, and Ahmadia.

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. Islam, Christianity, and traditional indigenous religions are practiced freely without government interference. There is no official state religion, and the Government neither subsidizes nor favors any particular religion. The practice of a particular faith is not known to confer any advantage or disadvantage in the political arena, the civil service, the military, or the private sector.

The Government has established the following religious holidays as national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, Ramadan, and Christmas Day. There is no evidence that these holidays have a negative effect on any religious group.

The Government requires that religious groups register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration confers legal status, but it entails no specific controls or benefits. There are no penalties for failure to register. All groups are given equal access to registration, and the Government routinely approves registrations. Religious groups are taxed only if they engage in lucrative activities, such as farming.

The law provides religious groups freedom of expression in their publications and broadcasts unless the judicial system determines that they are harming public order or committing slander; this has never occurred. The Ministry of Security grants publishing licenses, and the Superior Council of Information (CSI) grants broadcasting licenses. The Government has never denied a publishing or broadcasting license to any religious group that has requested one. The procedures to apply for publishing and broadcasting licenses are the same for both religious groups and commercial entities. Applications are first sent for review to the Ministry of Information and then forwarded to the Ministry of Security. If the Government does not respond to the application for a publishing license within the required timeframe, the applicant may begin publishing automatically.

Applicants for radio licenses must wait until the Authority for the Regulation of Telecommunications (ARTEL) assigns a frequency and determines that the group's broadcasting equipment is of a professional quality before beginning broadcasts. The Ministry of Security has the right to request samples of proposed publications and broadcasts to verify that they are in accordance with the stated nature of the religious group; however, there were no reports that religious broadcasters experienced difficulties with this regulation. In the case of radio stations, the CSI must be informed of the name of the broadcasting director as well as of the general programming content. Once the broadcast license is granted, the Government regulates the operation of religious radio stations in accordance with the same rules that apply to commercial and state-run stations. Stations must show that their workers are employed full-time, that ARTEL has been paid for the use of assigned frequencies, and that employee social security taxes and intellectual property fees have been paid. There were no special tax preferences granted to religious organizations operating print or broadcast media.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely and face no special restrictions. The Government neither forbids missionaries from entering the country nor restricts their activities; however, missionary groups occasionally face complicated bureaucratic procedures in pursuit of particular activities. For example, some Christian medical missionaries have difficulty operating in the country because of a partial restriction on foreign physicians. The restrictions are not aimed at religious groups.

Religious instruction is not offered in public schools; it is limited to private schools and to the home. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operate primary and secondary schools. The Government monitors both the nonreligious curriculum and the qualifications of teachers employed at these schools. Although school officials must submit the names of their directors to the Government, the Government never has been involved in appointing or approving these officials. The Government does not fund any religious schools. Unlike other private schools, religious schools pay no taxes if they do not conduct any lucrative activities. The Government reviews the curriculum of such schools to ensure that religiously oriented schools offer the full standard academic curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, in December 2004, security forces and local authorities forcibly vaccinated children in two villages. Members of two small religious communities, the "Sunnites" in Dar El Assane and "Les Pieds Nus" in Médine in Kenedougou Province, refused to allow their children to be inoculated against polio and measles. "Les Pieds Nus" opposed these vaccinations, arguing that they are "products made by white people" who are their "worst enemies." The Sunnites argued that the vaccinations interfered with the will of God. In Médine, police searched each home to find hidden children who were then vaccinated by medical personnel. In Dar El Assane, "Les Pieds Nus" stopped resisting when the local police authorities arrived. However, on May 18, the police returned for another round of vaccinations and carried out the forced vaccination of 110 children. A number of adult residents of the village were arrested and are still in police custody as of the writing of this report. The adults have been charged with conspiring to endanger a person.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious tolerance is widespread, and members of the same family often practice different religions.

The Ministry of Social Action and the Family maintains a shelter in Ouagadougou for women forced to flee their villages because they were suspected of being witches. Similar shelters financed by nongovernmental and religious organizations also are located in Ouagadougou, but older women forced from their villages are also commonly found as beggars in the streets of larger cities.

During the period covered by this report, the World Health Organization and the National Committee for the Fight Against Excision reported that some persons in the country are performing female genital mutilation on young girls in violation of the law forbidding the practice. Sometimes these persons use baptism ceremonies as a cover for cutting out the clitoris because the baby is expected to cry during the ceremony.

Tensions exist between and within some Muslims groups due to leadership disputes. Unlike in previous years, those tensions did not result in violent clashes within sectors of the Muslim community during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy and different Islamic organizations co-sponsored a number of workshops and public events discussing religious tolerance in the United States, and promoting its continued practice here. Muslim-American employees of the Embassy discussed religious diversity in the United States with local Muslim groups. The

Embassy also sent a journalist on an International Visitor Program concerning Muslim life in a democracy; the participant subsequently wrote a series of articles on religious tolerance. The Embassy maintains contacts with the majority Islamic community and other minority communities such as Christians and animists.

BURUNDI

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

There was no change in the status of 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,747 square miles and its population is approximately 7.2 million. Although reliable statistics on the number of followers of various religions are not available, a Roman Catholic official has estimated that 60 percent of the population is Catholic, with the largest concentration of adherents located in the center and south of the country. A Muslim leader has estimated that up to 10 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of which lives in urban areas. The remainder of the population belongs to other Christian churches, practices traditional indigenous religions, or has no religious affiliation. There are a number of small indigenous groups not affiliated with any major religion, some of which have won adherents by promising miracle cures for HIV/AIDS and other ailments.

Foreign missionary groups of many faiths are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, promulgated on March 18, 2005, 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. Discrimination on the basis of religious conviction is prohibited. A 1992 law covering nonprofit organizations, including religious groups, is the basis for the recognition and registration of religious bodies.

There is no state religion. The Catholic Church, which represents approximately 60 percent of the population, is predominant.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the Ministry of the Interior. Each association with a religious nature must file the following with the Ministry: the denomination or affiliation of the religious institution, a copy of its statutes, the address of its headquarters in the country, an address abroad if the local religious institution is a subsidiary, and information about the association's governing body and legal representative. If an association with a religious character fails to register with the Ministry, its representative will be reminded of the requirement to do so. If the representative does not comply, the place of worship or association will be instructed to close down. If it does not close down when ordered to do so, the representative of the religious institution or association can be jailed for 6 months to 5 years.

The Government requires that religious groups maintain a headquarters in the country.

While there is no law that accords tax exemptions to religious groups, the Government often waives taxes on imported religious articles used by religious institutions and also often waives taxes on the importation by religious institutions of goods destined for social development purposes. These exemptions are negotiated with the Finance Ministry on a case-by-case basis, and there is no indication of religious bias in the awarding of such exemptions.

The heads of major religious organizations are accorded diplomatic status. Foreign missionary groups openly promote their religious beliefs. The Government has welcomed their development assistance.

The Government recognizes Catholic holy days, including the Assumption, the Ascension, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. There are no official Muslim holy days;

however, Muslims can take holy days off from both government and private sector jobs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no known abuses of religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

In December 2003, unknown assailants killed Papal Nuncio Michael Courtney near Minago, Bujumbura Rural Province. The motive for the attack is unknown; there is no indication that the attack was motivated by the religious affiliation of the victim.

On July 12, 2004, Dieudonne Hakizimana, a Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People-National Liberation Force (PALIPEHUTU-FNL) rebel who reportedly admitted to taking part in the December 2003 killing of Papal Nuncio Michael Courtney, died in government custody from reportedly from wounds sustained prior to his capture on February 1, 2004.

On August 8, 2004, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL rebels reportedly captured a 20-member delegation headed by Anglican Bishop Pie Ntukamazina in Kabezi Commune, Bujumbura Rural Province. Government forces rescued the delegation the same day. The motive for the capture was not known.

On October 18, 2004, in Makamba Province, armed assailants shot and killed Catholic Priest Gerard Nzeyimana. According to press reports, Nzeyimana was specifically targeted; the killers reportedly verified his identity before killing him. *Catholic World News* reported that Nzeyimana was killed for his stance against human rights abuses; a news report from the Fides Agency quoted sources that identified the killers as PALIPEHUTU-FNL rebels.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials also maintain regular contact with leaders and members of various religious communities. Through the Ambassador's Self-Help and Democracy and Human Rights funds, the U.S. Embassy has supported Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups in the fields of health, education, and conflict resolution. In addition, the U.S. Embassy funded a range of human rights and democracy programs that support religious, as well as other, civil society organizations.

CAMEROON

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; however, there were a few incidents of religious discrimination by private actors. In addition, some religious groups face societal pressure and dis-

crimination within their regions, although this may reflect ethnic more than religious differences. In general, persons of different religions cohabit peacefully.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 183,568 square miles, and its population is approximately 16.5 million. Muslim centers and Christian churches of various denominations operate freely throughout the country. Approximately 40 percent of the population is at least nominally Christian, approximately 20 percent is at least nominally Muslim, and approximately 40 percent practices traditional indigenous religions or no religion. The Christian population is divided approximately equally between Catholic and Protestant denominations.

Christians are concentrated chiefly in the southern and western provinces; however, Muslims are found in large numbers in every province, and there is significant internal migration within the country. Large cities have significant populations of every religion, with mosques and churches often located near each other. The two anglophone provinces of the western region largely are Protestant; the francophone provinces of the southern and western regions largely are Catholic. In the northern provinces, the locally dominant Fulani (or Peuhl) ethnic group is mostly Muslim, but the overall population is fairly evenly mixed between Muslims, Christians, and animists, each often living in their own communities. The Bamoun ethnic group of the West Province is largely Muslim. Traditional indigenous religions are practiced in rural areas throughout the country but rarely are practiced publicly in cities, in part because many indigenous religions are intrinsically local in character.

Missionary groups are present throughout the country, including Roman Catholic, Muslim, the Baha'i Faith, Baptist, Presbyterian, evangelic Protestants, Methodist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unification Church, Seventh-day Adventists, New Church of God, and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (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. There is no official state religion.

The Law on Religious Congregations governs relations between the Government and religious groups. Religious groups must be approved by and registered with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINAT) to function legally. There were no reports that the Government refused to register any group; however, the process can take a number of years. It is illegal for a religious group to operate without official recognition, but the law prescribes no specific penalties. Although official recognition confers no general tax benefits, it allows religious groups to receive real estate as tax-free gifts and legacies for the conduct of their activities.

To register, a religious denomination must fulfill the legal requirement to qualify as a religious congregation. This definition includes "any group of natural persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship" or "any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine." The denomination then submits a file to the MINAT. The file must include a request for authorization, a copy of the group's charter describing planned activities, and the names and respective functions of the group's officials. The Minister reviews the file and sends it to the Presidency with a recommendation for a positive or negative decision. The President generally follows the recommendation of the Minister, and authorization is granted by a presidential decree. The approval process may take up to several years, due primarily to administrative delays.

The only religious groups known to be registered are Christian and Muslim groups and the Baha'i Faith. According to MINAT statistics released in 2002, there are 38 officially registered denominations, most of which are Christian. There also are numerous unregistered small religious groups that operate illegally but freely. The Government does not register traditional religious groups, stating that the practice of traditional religion is a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

Disputes between or within registered religious groups about control of places of worship, schools, real estate, or financial assets are resolved primarily by the MINAT rather than by the judiciary.

Missionary groups are present in the country and operate without impediment. The licensing requirements for foreign groups are the same as those for domestic religious denominations.

Several religious denominations operate primary and secondary schools. Although post-secondary education continues to be dominated by state institutions, private schools affiliated with religious denominations, including Catholic, Protestant, and Qur'anic schools, have been among the country's best schools at the primary and secondary levels for many years. The Ministry of Education is charged by law with ensuring that private schools run by religious groups meet the same standards as state-operated schools in terms of curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher training. For schools affiliated with religious groups, the Sub-Department of Confessional Education of the Ministry's Department of Private Education performs this oversight function. School attendance—public, private, or parochial—is mandatory through junior high school.

The Catholic Church operates two of the country's few modern private printing presses (one in Yaounde and one in Douala) and publishes a weekly newspaper, *L'Effort Camerounais*.

A 2000 government decree requires potential commercial radio broadcasters to submit a licensing application, pay a fee when the application is approved, and pay an annual licensing fee. The Government has been slow in granting authorization; consequently, there are many illegal radio stations operating in Cameroon. Two private religious radio stations that had been broadcasting illegally—the Pentecostal Radio Bonne Nouvelle and Radio Reine, the latter managed by a Catholic priest although not officially sponsored by the Catholic Church—continued to broadcast while awaiting official authorization. Radio Veritas has temporary authorization to broadcast and has been broadcasting without incident.

The state-sponsored television station, CRTV, carries 2 hours of Christian programming on Sunday mornings, normally an hour of Catholic Mass and an hour from a Protestant church. There is also one broadcast hour dedicated to Islam on Friday evenings. State-sponsored radio broadcasts Christian and Muslim religious services on a regular basis, and both the radio and television stations periodically broadcast religious ceremonies on national holidays or during other national events.

Christian and Muslim religious holidays are celebrated as national holidays. These include Good Friday (Christian), Ascension Day (Christian), Assumption Day (Christian), Christmas Day (Christian), the Feast of the Lamb (Muslim), and the End of Ramadan (Muslim). These holidays do not negatively affect non-observers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, government officials have disapproved of and questioned criticism of the Government by religious institutions and leaders; however, there were no reports that government officials used force to suppress such criticism.

The practice of witchcraft is a criminal offense under the national penal code; however, persons generally are prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with some other offense, such as murder. Witchcraft traditionally has been a common explanation for diseases of unknown origin.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion by the Government. In addition, the Government responded promptly to assist the U.S. Embassy in the case of the forced conversion of American citizens by a private actor. In January 2004, the Embassy assisted an American citizen in securing physical custody over her two American citizen children, who were being held by their Cameroonian-born father on a family compound and forced to worship a family elder and perform invasive purification rituals. Following the Embassy's intervention in cooperation with law enforcement officials, the mother and children were repatriated to the United States. The religious leader of the group was detained pending formal charges but later released for lack of sufficient evidence. At the end of the period covered by this report, the compound was locked and no outside observers were admitted.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some religious groups faced societal pressures within their regions. In the northern provinces, especially in rural areas, societal discrimination

by Muslims against Christians and persons who practice traditional indigenous religions continued.

In May 2004, a group of Muslim radicals circulated anti-Christian tracts in the North, Far North, and Adamaoua provinces. Both Muslim and Christian religious leaders in the area reacted quickly to identify the source of the tracts and encourage their congregations to respect religious diversity and promote religious tolerance. In April 2005, the Garoua assistant sub-divisional officer reported that a meeting with all the religious groups had been held the week before to discuss extremism in the area. The group reiterated their previous statement, asserting that it was non-residents who circulated the extremist tracts. Investigations were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2003, a Catholic Church official in the Far North Province reported that Muslim "fundamentalists" who trained in Pakistan and Sudan were jeopardizing the usually good relationship between Muslims and Christians in the region. According to the official, these fundamentalists were gaining support, particularly among the youth, because of the high levels of poverty and unemployment in the northern provinces. While the official did not feel that fundamentalism had caused serious problems in the region, he recognized that relations between religious groups could deteriorate if the economic situation remains poor. The official also mentioned that some Christian groups were aggressively working to convert Muslims in the region.

In May 2004, Pastor Alombah Godlove was reportedly beaten and fined by the traditional ruler, or Fon, of his village for providing a Christian burial for a village elder in accordance with the deceased's will. The Fon believed that the elder, who was also a member of a traditional religious secret society, should have been buried with traditional rites. At the end of the period covered by this report, the case was under investigation by the National Commission on Human Rights.

Michel Atanga Effa and Gervais Balla, charged with the 2003 killing of German missionary Anton Probst, remained under preventive detention, pending trial, at the end of the period covered by this report.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the suspect accused of the 2001 killing of Appolinaire Ndi, a parish priest in the Yaounde diocese, remained in detention without a set trial date.

From time to time, the northern region suffers from ethnic tensions between the Fulani, an ethnic (or multi-ethnic) Muslim group that conquered most of the region 200 years ago, and the Kirdi, the descendants of groups that practiced traditional indigenous religions. The Fulani conquered or displaced many Kirdi as part of a westward expansion of Islam in Africa. Although some Kirdi subsequently adopted Islam, the Kirdi have remained socially, educationally, and economically disadvantaged relative to the Fulani. The slavery still practiced in parts of the north is reported to be largely enslavement of Kirdi (both Muslim and non-Muslim) by Fulani.

The multiplication of new unaffiliated religious groups, most of which are Protestant, has led established churches to vigorously denounce what they label "sects" or "cults." Leaders of established religious organizations characterize and denounce these "sects" as detrimental to societal peace and harmony. Some religious leaders reportedly warn congregations during major celebrations to beware of such groups.

Religious affiliation may influence political choice. In April 2005, an administration official from the North (Garoua) said that members of one of the leading political parties of the region openly stated that they could not vote for a Christian.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In 2004, the U.S. Embassy organized a panel discussion on "Islam and Religious Tolerance," excerpts of which were aired during two editions of the weekly television program "Understanding Islam." The Ambassador also reached out to the Muslim community by hosting an Iftar during Ramadan. Approximately 500 copies of the pamphlet "Muslim Life in America" were distributed to Muslim leaders throughout the country. The Embassy also provided regular assistance to the American Missionary community and consular repatriation services to American citizens in a case of forced religious conversion. Additionally, the Ambassador and other staff members have reached out to the Rain Forest International School (RFIS), a Yaounde school predominately serving the Protestant missionary community.

In 2004, the Embassy provided a small grant and equipment support to the Islamic Student Union and maintains regular contact with the organization. Another grant was given to support the creation of the Federation of Muslim Women in Cameroon that enabled the organization to host a nation-wide conference that brought together Muslim women from all 10 of the provinces. The Embassy worked

closely with the local imams to ensure they have an opportunity to take advantage of Voice of America's new Islamic channel.

Embassy officials met on several occasions with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Douala, Christian Cardinal Tumi, to discuss various issues including religious freedom, human rights, freedom of the press, and the democratization process. Embassy officials have also met with the imam of the Central Mosque in Yaounde, the Bishop of Maroua, the Archbishop of Yaounde, and various missionary groups active throughout the country to discuss religious freedom and human rights. In addition, during their regular trips within the 10 provinces, Embassy officials continued to meet with local religious officials to discuss any problems with government officials or individuals belonging to other faiths and denominations.

CAPE VERDE

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago with 9 of its islands inhabited. It has an area of 1,557 square miles and its population is approximately 458,000, according to the National Statistics Institute. More than 85 percent of the population is at least nominally Roman Catholic, according to an informal poll taken by local churches. The largest Protestant denomination is the Church of the Nazarene. Other groups include the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Assemblies of God, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, and various other Pentecostal and evangelical groups. There also are small Muslim and Baha'i communities. The number of atheists in the country is estimated at less than 1 percent of the population.

There is no association between religious differences and ethnic or political affiliations; however, the Roman Catholic hierarchy is sympathetic to the Movement for Democracy (MPD) party, which ruled the country from 1991 to 2001. While many Catholics once were hostile toward the Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV), which again became the governing party in 2001, some have become supporters of the PAICV due to conflict within the MPD party and dissatisfaction over the latter's performance.

There are foreign missionary groups operating in the country, including evangelical groups from Brazil and the United States.

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 new Penal Code, which entered into force in July, 2004, makes violation of religious freedom a crime subject to a penalty of between 3 months and 3 years imprisonment.

There is no state religion. The Constitution provides for the separation of church and state and prohibits the state from imposing any religious beliefs and practices.

The Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status in national life. For example, the Government provides the Catholic Church with free television broadcast time for religious services. Also, the Government observes Christian holy days, such as Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter, All Saints' Day, and Christmas, as official holidays. Furthermore, each municipality has a holiday to honor its patron saint. The Government does not observe any other religious holidays.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association. All associations, whether religious or secular, must register with the Ministry of Justice to be recognized as legal entities.

Registration is mandatory under the Constitution and the Law of Associations. The purpose of mandatory registration is for the Government to keep track of and discourage the formation of any possible illegal associations. The Constitution states that associations cannot have illegal objectives or be involved in illegal activities. For example, it is illegal for a group to organize for the purpose of persecuting others. There are no special incentives for registering and failure to do so has not resulted in penalty or prosecution. One disadvantage of not registering is the inability of unregistered groups to apply for government or private loans and benefits as an association.

To register, a religious group must submit a copy of its charter and statutes, signed by the members of the group, to the Minister of Justice. The Constitution sets forth the criteria for all associations, including religious ones, and states that the association may not be military or armed; may not be aimed at promoting violence, racism, xenophobia, or dictatorship; and may not be in violation of the penal law. Failure to register with the Ministry of Justice does not result in any restriction on religious belief or practice.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The case before the Supreme Court of four Seventh-day Adventists who were accused of desecrating a Catholic church on Boa Vista island was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. This dialogue focused on the importance of religious freedom in an open society and the need to maintain the present levels of religious tolerance.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The new Constitution, which was adopted by referendum in December 2004, provides for freedom of religion while prohibiting religious fundamentalism or intolerance. The constitutional provision prohibiting religious fundamentalism was widely understood to target Muslims. The Government generally permitted adherents of all religions to worship without interference.

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

The generally tolerant relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. No cases of mob killings of persons suspected of practicing witchcraft were reported during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 242,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.7 million, of which an estimated 690,000 live in the capital, Bangui. An estimated 50 percent of the population is Christian, approximately 15 percent is Muslim, and approximately 35 percent practices traditional indigenous religions or no religion. Most Christians also practice some aspects of traditional indigenous religions. The Government does not keep data on the number of nontraditional religious groups in the country, and there is no data available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals. There is anecdotal evidence of an increase in conversions to Islam by younger persons.

In general, immigrants and foreign nationals in the country who practice a particular religion characterize themselves as Catholic, Protestant, or Muslim.

There are many missionary groups operating in the country, including the Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Grace Brethren, and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as missionaries from Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other African countries.

Many missionaries who left the country due to fighting from November 2002 to March 2003 between government forces and rebels, particularly in western regions, have returned to the country and resumed their activities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The December 2004 Constitution provides for freedom of religion, although it prohibits what the Government considers religious fundamentalism or intolerance. The constitutional provision prohibiting religious fundamentalism was widely understood to target Muslims. The Government generally permits adherents of all religions to worship without interference. There is no state religion, and there is no indication that the Government favors any particular religion.

Contrary to past years, the Government no longer grants free air time each week on the official radio station to religious groups. All religious representatives that wish to broadcast on public airwaves must pay.

Religious groups (except for traditional indigenous religious groups) are required by law to register with the Ministry of Interior. This registration is free and confers official recognition and certain limited benefits, such as customs duty exemption for the importation of vehicles or equipment, but it does not confer a general tax exemption. The administrative police of the Ministry of Interior monitor groups that have failed to register; however, the police have not attempted to impose any penalty on such groups.

Religious organizations and missionary groups are free to proselytize, worship, and construct places of worship.

Although the Government does not explicitly prohibit religious instruction in public schools, religious instruction is not part of the overall public school curriculum. There are approximately 12 Catholic schools in Bangui.

The Government celebrates several Christian holy days as national holidays. These include Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, the Monday after Pentecost, and All Saints' Day. The Government does not officially celebrate Islamic holy days; however, Muslims are allowed to take holy days off from work.

In the past, the Government has taken positive steps to promote interfaith dialogue, including organizing interfaith masses to promote peace. President Francois Bozize was very involved in religious activities and maintained close ties with a range of religious leaders in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Any religious or nonreligious group that the Government considers subversive is subject to sanctions. The Ministry of Interior may decline to register, suspend the operations of, or ban any organization that it deems offensive to public morals or likely to disturb the peace. The Ministry of Interior also may intervene to resolve internal conflicts about property, finances, or leadership within religious groups. The Government has banned the Unification Church since the mid-1980s as a subversive organization likely to disturb the peace, specifically in connection with alleged paramilitary training of young church members. The Government imposed no new sanctions on any religious groups during the period covered by this report.

The practice of witchcraft is a criminal offense under the Penal Code; however, persons generally are prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with some other offense, such as murder. Witchcraft traditionally has been a common explanation for diseases of which the causes were unknown. Although many traditional indigenous religions include or accommodate belief in the efficacy of witchcraft, they generally

approve of harmful witchcraft only for defensive or retaliatory purposes and purport to offer protection against it. The practice of witchcraft is widely understood to encompass attempts to harm others not only by magic but also by covert means of established efficacy such as poisons.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2003, the Minister of Territorial Administration, in response to his stated concern over the proliferation of churches, suspended the activities of 34 Protestant churches on the allegation that they were created without consideration for official rules and regulations. This decree established preconditions for reopening the churches, including proven membership of at least 1,000 persons, evidence that the clergy had graduated from accredited religious schools, and documentation that the church was created with respect to local law. According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, several of the churches have since fulfilled these requirements and reopened.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Although in general there is religious tolerance among members of different religious groups, there have been occasional reports that some villagers who were believed to be witches were harassed, beaten, or sometimes killed by neighbors. Courts have tried, convicted, and sentenced some persons for crimes of violence against suspected witches. Contrary to past years, there were no reported mob killings of persons suspected of practicing witchcraft in recent years.

In recent years, bandits have attacked missionaries on several occasions. During the period covered by this report, there were no arrests or reports of any action taken against the perpetrators.

When serious social or political conflicts have arisen, simultaneous prayer ceremonies have been held in churches, temples, and mosques to ask for divine assistance. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace often conducts developmental and educational programs and seminars throughout the country. The members work closely with other church groups and social organizations on social issues. During the period covered by this report, there were several large-scale ecumenical services organized in Bangui.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. After a temporary suspension of operations from November 2002 through January 2005, the Embassy partially reopened with the arrival of a Charge d'Affaires and resumed the monitoring of political and human rights developments in the country.

CHAD

The Constitution provides for religious freedom; however, at times the Government limited this right for a number of groups in certain situations.

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

The different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, although tensions between Christians and Muslims continued. In October 2004, there was marketplace violence between Christians and Muslims that resulted in 12 dead and 21 wounded.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 495,755 square miles, and its population is approximately 9 million. Of the total population, 54 percent are Muslim, approximately one-third are Christian, and the remainder practice traditional indigenous religions or no religion at all. Most northerners practice Islam, and most southerners practice Christianity or a traditional indigenous religion; however, population patterns are becoming more complex, especially in urban areas. Many citizens, despite stated religious affiliation, do not practice their religion regularly.

The vast majority of Muslims are adherents of a moderate branch of mystical Islam (Sufism) known locally as Tidjani, which originated in 1727 under Sheik Ahmat Tidjani in present-day Morocco and Algeria. Tidjani Islam, as practiced in the country, incorporates some local African religious elements. A small minority of the country's Muslims (5 to 10 percent) are considered fundamentalist.

Roman Catholics are the largest Christian denomination in the country; most Protestants are affiliated with various evangelical Christian groups.

Adherents of two other religions, the Baha'i faith and Jehovah's Witnesses, also are present in the country. Both faiths were introduced after independence in 1960 and therefore are considered to be "new" religions. Because of their relatively recent origin and their affiliation with foreign practitioners, both are perceived as foreign.

A representative of the religious community sits on the Revenue Management College, the body that oversees the allocation of oil revenues. The seat rotates between Muslim and Christian leaders every 3 years. In 2004, the Muslim representative handed responsibilities over to a Catholic priest designated by the Christian community.

There are foreign missionaries representing both Christian and Islamic groups. Itinerant Muslim imams also visit, primarily from Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for religious freedom; however, at times the Government limited this right. The Constitution also provides that the country shall be a secular state; however, a large portion of senior government officials are Muslim, and some policies favor Islam in practice. For example, the Government sponsors annual Hajj trips to Mecca for certain officials.

The Government requires religious groups, including both foreign missionary groups and domestic religious groups, to register with the Ministry of the Interior's Department for Religious Affairs. Registration confers official recognition but does not confer any tax preferences or other benefits. There are no specific legal penalties for failure to register, and there were no reports that any group had failed to apply for registration or that the registration process is unduly burdensome.

Foreign missionaries do not face restrictions but must register and receive authorization from the Ministry of Interior, as do other foreigners traveling around the country. There were no reports that authorization was withheld from any group. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries proselytize in the country.

The Government celebrates both Christian and Muslim holidays as national holidays. Muslim national holidays include Eid al-Adha (February), the Prophet Muhammed's birthday (May), and Eid al-Fitr (November). Christian holidays include Easter Monday (April), All Saints' Day (November), and Christmas Day (December).

Religious instruction is prohibited in public schools. All religions are permitted to operate private schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Islamic religious group Fa'id al-Djaria (also spelled Faydal Djaria), a Sufi group that adheres to a mystical form of Islam, continued to be banned during the period covered by this report. The group arrived in the country from Nigeria and Senegal and incorporates singing and dancing into its religious ceremonies and activities. Male and female members of the group freely interact with one another during religious gatherings. The group is found from the Kanem region around Lake Chad into neighboring Chari Baguirmi. The Director of Religious and Traditional Affairs, the Superior Council for Islamic Affairs, and certain ulama (Muslim religious authorities) objected to some of Fa'id al-Djaria's religious customs, which they deemed un-Islamic. The Minister of Interior banned the group in 1998 and again in 2001. The 2001 ban was implemented on technical grounds, and the Government did not recognize the group's registration. In 2004, the ban continued and the

group's case was still in court. The group still carries out activities in the Chari Baguirmi region of the country.

While the Government treats most faiths or denominations equally, Islamic congregations appear to have an easier time obtaining official permission for their activities. Non-Islamic religious leaders also claim that Islamic officials and organizations receive greater tax exemptions and unofficial financial support from the Government. In the past, the Government reportedly accorded public lands to Islamic leaders for the purpose of building mosques, while other religious denominations must purchase land at market rates to build places of worship. Recently, however, the Government has attempted to balance requests for tax exemptions and land requests between Christian and Muslim groups.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government has imprisoned and sanctioned fundamentalist Islamic imams believed to be promoting conflict among Muslims; however, several of these imams continue to preach. Imam Sheikh Mahamat Marouf, a fundamentalist Islamic leader from Abeche, continued to be legally prohibited from leading prayers; however, he continued to preach without restriction. His followers were allowed to pray in their mosques, but the Government continued to forbid them from debating religious beliefs in any way that might be considered proselytizing (viewed as a threat to public order).

Several human rights organizations reported on the problem of the "mahadjir" children. Qur'anic teachers force these children, who attended certain Islamic schools, to beg for food and money. There were no real estimates as to the number of mahadjir children; however, UNICEF included these children in a recent study and in its child protection efforts. The Government held a meeting to sensitize community leaders to the issue in May 2004.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The different religious communities generally coexisted without problems; however, on October 30, 2004, there was marketplace violence in the southern town of Bebedja between Christians and Muslims that resulted in 12 dead and 21 wounded. Police arrested approximately 20 persons. At the end of the reporting period the suspects remained in detention at a Ndjamena prison pending conclusion of an investigation and referral of the case to a grand jury for possible indictments.

During the reporting period, there were no reports of tension between Christians and Muslims in reaction to proselytizing by evangelical Christians.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reported acts of vandalism against churches. In 2003, a church in the predominantly Muslim town of Abeche was burned; it was the most serious event in a series of acts of vandalism against the church. The Church of Christian Assemblies in Chad (ACT) had built the structure following a land dispute with Abeche's Islamic Affairs Committee that dates back several years. In 2004, the Government gave new land to ACT to resolve the issue.

Most interfaith dialogue happens on an organizational level and not through government intervention.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In the period covered by this report, the Embassy sponsored a well-received 2-week speaker's program which featured an American imam who met with numerous religious, civil society, and academic groups. He promoted dialogue between religious groups and among Muslims and discussed women's rights under Islam. The Ambassador also hosted an Iftar for Muslim leaders during Ramadan.

Embassy officials have continued to increase their outreach efforts, particularly among Muslim leaders, communities, and groups, including various trade associations, Arab-speaking journalists, and youth and women's groups. As part of this

strategy, the Embassy donated books and posters regarding Islam in America to key Muslim leaders and to local schools. The Embassy also expanded English-language learning opportunities to a Muslim university and a local mosque. Seventy-five micro-scholarships were given to underserved populations, including Muslim children. In addition, the Embassy has worked with Arabic-speaking women's associations, parent-teacher organizations, and journalists. Embassy officers also meet with various religious leaders and groups during travel outside of the capital. Prominent Muslim leaders participated in U.S. Government-sponsored International Visitor Programs that focused on teaching American politics and understanding U.S. societal, cultural, and political processes.

UNION OF COMOROS

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, authorities continued to infringe upon this right.

There was no change in the status of the respect for religious freedom, which is sometimes limited, during the period covered by this report. An overwhelming majority, approximately 99 percent, of the population is Sunni Muslim. Government authorities continued to prohibit Christians from proselytizing; however, there were no known instances where the local authorities and population restricted the right of Christians to practice other aspects of their faith.

There is widespread societal discrimination against Christians in all sectors of life.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 838 square miles, and its population is approximately 635,000. An overwhelming majority—approximately 99 percent—of the population is Sunni Muslim. There are fewer than 500 Christian citizens (less than 1 percent of the population). The fewer than 500 foreigners who live on the islands are Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, Catholics, and members of other Christian religious groups.

A few foreign religious groups maintain humanitarian programs in the country but, by agreement with the Government, do not engage in proselytizing.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, which reincorporates Anjouan, Ngazidja (Grand Comore), and Moheli into a new federation that grants the islands greater autonomy, specifically provides for freedom of religion; however, the Constitution says that citizens will draw principles and rules that will govern the country from Muslim religious tenets. While the Constitution does not proclaim Islam as the official religion, government authorities continued to prohibit Christians from proselytizing.

The Grand Mufti is part of the Government and manages a department that handles issues concerning religion and religious administration. The Grand Mufti's position is attached to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, and he counsels the Government on matters of Islamic faith and ensures that Islamic laws are respected. The Grand Mufti is nominated by the President. The Grand Mufti periodically consulted with a group of elders to assess whether the principles of Islam are respected, and he regularly addresses the nation on the radio regarding social and religious issues such as marriage, divorce, and education.

The tenets of Islam are taught in conjunction with the Arabic language in public schools at the middle school level. There are no separate provisions made for religious minorities in public schools. There are at least two private schools on the island of Ngazidja (Grand Comore) that cost approximately \$27 (15,000 Comorian francs) per month. Almost all children between the ages of 4 and 7 also attend schools to learn to recite and understand the Qur'an, although attendance is not compulsory for religious minorities.

Several Muslim holy days, including the Muslim New Year, the Prophet's birthday, and Eid al-Fitr, are national holidays.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed, registered, or officially recognized.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There are two Roman Catholic churches, one in Moroni, on the island of Ngazidja (Grand Comore), and one in Mutsamudu, on the island of Anjouan. There is a Protestant church in Moroni. Many Christians practiced their faith in private residences. Foreigners were allowed to practice their faith, but they were not allowed to proselytize. If caught proselytizing for religions other than Islam, foreigners are deported, while citizens are imprisoned.

Unlike in previous years, there were no known cases where local authorities and religious leaders harassed Christians on Anjouan.

Bans on alcohol and immodest dress are enforced sporadically, usually during religious months, such as Ramadan. Alcohol can be imported and sold with a permit from the Government.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In September, the island Government of Anjouan dispersed a gathering of several hundred followers of the Djawula interpretation of Islam because the group had not received the required prior authorization from the island government. The authorities also were concerned that the organizers would upset public order. Authorities arrested several participants and shaved their beards before releasing them. This action was taken by the Government in Anjouan in an attempt to quell more radical forms of Islam from taking root on the island.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There is widespread societal discrimination against Christians in some sectors of life. On Ngazidja (Grand Comore), there are no legal restrictions that prevent Christians from attending church, and noncitizen Christians are allowed to practice their faith without government intervention as long as they do not attempt to convert citizens. Societal pressure and intimidation continued to restrict the use of the country's three churches to noncitizens.

There is concern that Islamic fundamentalism is increasing as young citizens return to the country after fundamentalist Islamic theological studies abroad and seek to impose a more fundamentalist adherence to Islamic religious law on their family members and associates. The Union Government has established a university, and government representatives stated that an important goal of the university is to give young citizens the option of pursuing university studies in the country instead of overseas where they might absorb more radical ideas. Currently there are 2,087 students enrolled in the university, which provides classes in basic sciences and languages.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. An officer from the U.S. Embassy in Mauritius met with religious leaders on the island of Anjouan during the year.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The transitional Constitution and the proposed new constitution provide 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 in areas under central government control during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. In areas under marginal government control, respect for religious freedom improved.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there continued to be credible reports that a number of chil-

dren and elderly persons were accused of witchcraft and abandoned or abused by their families.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 905,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 60 million. Approximately 50 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 20 percent is Protestant, 10 percent is Kimbanguist, and 10 percent is Muslim. The remainder largely practice traditional indigenous religions. There are no statistics available on the percentage of atheists. Minority religious groups include, among others, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

There is no reliable data on active participation in religious services. Ethnic and political differences generally are not linked to religious differences.

Foreign missionaries operate freely within the country. Missionary groups include Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Evangelicals, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Most religious groups are scattered throughout the country and are widely represented in most cities and large towns. Muslims are mostly concentrated in the province of Maniema. Members of traditional Bunda dia Kongo reside predominately in Bas Congo.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 26 of the transitional Constitution provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. During the period covered by this report, the transitional Parliament approved a new constitution that provides for the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; the constitution was scheduled to be presented to the people for ratification before the end of 2005. There is no state religion.

The establishment and operation of religious institutions is provided for and regulated through a statutory order on the Regulation of Nonprofit Associations and Public Utility Institutions. Requirements for the establishment of a religious organization are simple and generally are not subject to abuse. Exemption from taxation is among the benefits granted to religious organizations. A law regulating religious organizations grants civil servants the power to recognize, suspend recognition of, or dissolve religious groups; however, this law was not invoked in the period covered by this report. Although the law restricts the process of recognition, officially recognized religions are free to establish places of worship and to train clergy.

A 2001 decree allows nonprofit organizations, including religious organizations, to operate without restriction provided they register with the Government by submitting a copy of their bylaws and constitution. The Government requires practicing religious groups to be registered; however, in practice unregistered religious groups operate unhindered.

Although the Government requires foreign religious groups to obtain the approval of the President through the Minister of Justice, foreign religious groups generally operate without restriction once they receive approval from the Government. Many recognized churches have external ties, and foreign missionaries generally are allowed to proselytize. The Government generally did not interfere with foreign missionaries.

The Government promoted interfaith understanding by supporting and consulting with the country's five major religious groups (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, and Kimbanguist). The Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders serves as an informal forum for religious leaders to gather and discuss issues of concern.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. While the Government generally did not interfere with foreign missionaries, these groups were not exempt from general restrictions or violent crimes committed by security forces. For example, on May 7, 2005, men in military uniform shot and killed a 71-year-old Belgian Jesuit priest while robbing a grocery store. In early June, police arrested and charged five Congolese Armed Forces deserters with the crime. At the end of the period covered by this report, they were still awaiting trial. The victim was in a high crime area, and there was no evidence the man was targeted because he was a priest.

Bundu Dia Kongo, an ethnically based spiritual and political movement that called for the establishment of an “ethnically pure” kingdom from the Bakongo tribe, remained outlawed.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

In areas under marginal government control, respect for religious freedom improved. Although a Catholic parish was looted in rural South Kivu in November 2004, there was no evidence that the robbery was motivated by religious factors. No individuals responsible for cases from previous periods have been charged, tried, or convicted of wrongdoing.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, many children and elderly persons were accused of practicing witchcraft and driven from their homes by their families.

During the period covered by this report, there continued to be reports of incidents in which persons suspected of witchcraft were attacked, tortured, killed, or driven from their homes. There is a common belief in the region that some persons have the power to cast spells on others; this fear sometimes rises to mass hysteria. During the period covered by this report, there was an increase in reports that certain leaders of “revelation” churches, or small evangelical Protestant churches, exploited the people’s fear of witchcraft by either encouraging families to drive accused witches from their homes or performing costly and painful exorcisms, in which victims may be locked in boxes for long periods of time, starved for several days, or receive other harsh treatment. No one was charged, prosecuted, or punished for such crimes reported in previous years.

Leaders of major religions consult with one another through the Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials regularly meet with religious leaders throughout the country. In addition, the Embassy awards self-help, human rights, and democracy funds to religious groups for a wide range of activities. For example, the Embassy provided funding for Catholic nuns to increase livestock production at an orphanage, the Salvation Army to purchase a corn sheller, and a Baptist group to teach democracy, civics, and elections in schools. Also, the Embassy conducted extensive outreach with members of the Muslim community and awarded 22 scholarships for the second year in a row to Muslim citizens to assist them in learning English.

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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.

While the generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, the close link between certain self-proclaimed messianic groups and opposition political movements was a source of tension during the civil war period from 1997 to 2001. In 2003, the Government and the last armed opposition group, the Ninjas, signed a peace accord that greatly reduced these tensions.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 132,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 3 million. Approximately half of its citizens are Christian; of these, approximately 90 percent are Roman Catholic. Other denominations include Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. There is a growing Muslim community in the country, currently estimated at 2 percent of the population. Most work in the urban centers and are immigrants from West Africa and Lebanon, with some also from North Africa. The West African immigrants arrive mostly from Mali, Benin, Togo, Mauritania, and Senegal. The Lebanese are primarily Sunni Muslims. There is also a large Chadian Muslim population.

The remainder of the population is made up of practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, those who belong to various messianic groups, and those who practice no religion at all. A small minority of the Christian community practices Kimbanguism, a syncretistic movement that originated in the neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo. While retaining many elements of Christianity, Kimbanguism also recognizes its founder (Simon Kimbangu) as a prophet and incorporates African traditional beliefs, such as ancestor worship.

Mystical or messianic practices (particularly among the ethnic Lari population in the Pool region) have been associated with opposition political movements, including some elements of the armed insurrection in the southern part of the country from 1998 to 2001. While the association persists, its influence has diminished considerably since 2003.

Several Western Christian missionary groups are active in the country, including members of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Salvation Army, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and several Catholic religious orders.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and specifically forbids discrimination on the basis of religion. 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 official state religion.

All organizations, including religious organizations, businesses, unions, and charitable or nonprofit societies, are required to register with and be approved by the Government. There were no reports of discrimination against religious groups in this process, although all admit that it is time-consuming and lengthy. Penalties for failure to register include fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation for foreigners, but no criminal penalties are applicable.

The Government recognizes the Christian holy days of Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension, and Pentecost Monday as national holidays. Muslim holy days are not nationally observed; however, they are respected. For example, employers grant leave for those who wish to observe religious holy days not on the national calendar.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In 2003, the Government and the Ninja rebel militia group, led by self-proclaimed prophet Frederic Bistangou (also known as Pasteur Ntumi), signed a peace accord. Subsequently, there have been no reports of abuse or desecration of churches as alleged in previous years.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Although uncommon, interreligious marriage is generally socially acceptable. Children of majority and minority religions usually sit side-by-side in school. In practice, religion is generally kept separate from public education. Reli-

gious tolerance is greater in urban areas than in the rural areas. In some forest communities where there are pygmy populations, there is some discrimination against them in education and employment as well as intolerance for their social practices, including at times their animist religious practices.

All organized religious groups are represented in a joint ecumenical council, which meets yearly during February.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. These discussions include highlighting the importance of religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidency, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the National Assembly. The U.S. Embassy also has implemented programs with key civil society groups that address these issues. The Embassy supports four human rights organizations whose goals consist of strengthening recognition of religious diversity, including animism. U.S. Government funding has also assisted the local branch of CARITAS, which is affiliated with Catholic Relief Services and local church organizations that implement grassroots and micro-enterprise activities.

COTE D'IVOIRE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, since the 2002 rebellion, the Government has targeted suspected rebels and rebel sympathizers among whom there are many Muslims.

The Government is facing its greatest political crisis since independence following the September 2002 failed coup attempt and mutiny that led to a de facto division of the country. After the onset of the crisis, the Government cracked down on persons perceived to be associated with the rebellion; the crackdown particularly affected persons of northern origins, many of whom were Muslims, and who were presumed to be supporters of the rebellion. In January 2003, all major parties to the crisis signed the Linas-Marcoussis Accord (LMA), which aimed to end the crisis and bring about national reconciliation. This agreement was followed by two others signed in Accra and Pretoria during the period covered by this report, but there was halting progress on LMA implementation. There were fewer reports that security and defense forces harassed Muslims and persons of northern origins because of their alleged activities to endanger the security of the State.

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.

Relations among the various religious groups were at times strained as a consequence of the national crisis; however, strong efforts by religious and civil society groups have helped prevent the political crisis from turning into a religious conflict. There is some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of traditional indigenous religions. The Collective of Civil Society for Peace, created shortly after the failed 2002 coup and containing the main religious and human rights organizations, has visited and sensitized the different ethnic and religious communities throughout the country, including in rebel held zones.

The U.S. Government emphasizes religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Government officials also meet regularly with religious leaders, both individually and as a group, and have engaged them in projects to advance religious tolerance and conciliation.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 124,500 square miles, and its population is approximately 18 million. Religious groups in the country include Muslims, Christians, practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, syncretists that practice a mixture of Christian and indigenous religions, and others. Christian churches include the Roman Catholic Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Southern Baptist Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The largest Protestant church is the Protestant Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire. Evangelical Christian churches are also active. The Shekinah Glory Ministries and the Assemblies of God are evangelical churches.

Syncretistic churches include the Harrist Church (an African Protestant denomination founded in the country in 1913 by a Liberian preacher named William Wade Harris), the Primitive Protestant Church, God's Soldiers (founded by an Ivoirian woman), and the Messianic Church. Bossonism, a traditional religious practice from the Akan ethnic group, is also practiced.

Other religions include Buddhism, the Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the International Association for the Conscience of Krishna, the Limmoudim of Rabbi Jesus (a small Christian group, the origins of which are unknown), and the Movement of Raelis. Many religious groups in the country are associated with U.S. religious groups.

There are foreigners who are practitioners of the Jewish faith and members of the Anglican Church and the Orthodox Church that have good relationships with the aforementioned groups, but who generally do not join the collectives formed by religious leaders to promote dialogue and harmony.

The most recent national census, conducted in 1998, indicated that among citizens and noncitizen residents, Muslims made up approximately 38.6 percent of the country's resident population; Catholics, 19.4 percent; practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, 11.9 percent; Protestants, 6.6 percent; other Christians, 3.1 percent; practitioners of other religions, 1.7 percent; Harrists, 1.3 percent; and persons without religious preference or affiliation, 16.7 percent. Among citizens only, 27.4 percent were Muslim, 20.8 percent were Catholic, 15.4 percent practiced traditional indigenous religions, 8.2 percent were Protestant, 3.4 percent were of other Christian affiliations, 1.9 percent practiced other religions, 1.6 percent were Harrist, and 20.7 percent were without religious affiliation. Foreigners living in the country were 70.5 percent Muslim and 15.4 percent Catholic, with small percentages practicing other religions.

Most of the country's many syncretistic religions are forms of Christianity that contain some traditional indigenous practices and rituals. Many such religions were founded by local or other African prophets and are organized around, and dependent upon, the founder's personality. Some emphasize faith healing or sacred objects imbued with supernatural powers to bring health and good fortune. Many nominal Christians and Muslims practice some aspects of traditional indigenous religions, especially in difficult times.

Generally, practitioners of traditional religions have followed a trend toward conversion to Christianity and Islam. Recently, there has been an increase in the membership of evangelical churches. Missionary work, urbanization, immigration, and higher education levels have led to a decline in the percentage of practitioners of traditional religions from 37 percent in 1975 to 11.9 percent in 1998.

Muslims are found in the greatest numbers in the northern half of the country, although they also are increasingly numerous in the cities of the south, west, and east due to immigration, migration, and interethnic marriages. In 1998, Muslims composed 45.5 percent of the total urban population and 33.5 percent of the total rural population. Catholics live mostly in the southern, central, and eastern portions of the country, although recently some animists in the north have converted to Catholicism. Practitioners of traditional indigenous religions are concentrated in rural areas of the northern, western, central, and eastern regions. Protestants are concentrated in the central, eastern, and southwest regions. Members of the Harrist Church are concentrated in the south.

Political and religious affiliations tend to follow ethnic lines. The north is associated with Islam, and the south is associated with Christianity and traditional religions. There is also a correlation between religious and political affiliations and social class. For example, most Muslims favor the Rally of Republicans (RDR), and the merchant class is mostly Muslim.

Immigrants from other parts of Africa generally are at least nominally Muslim or Christian. The majority of foreign missionaries are European or U.S. representatives of established religions, although a man based in Japan established a Hare Krishna group during the period covered by this report.

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 there is no state religion, the Government informally favors Christianity for historical and ethnic reasons.

Beginning with the 2001 Forum for National Reconciliation, the Government initiated several programs aimed at improving relations between the Government and religious groups. However, some Muslims believe that their religious and ethnic affiliation makes them targets of discrimination by the Government with regard to the

renewal of national identity cards. Since the power sharing Government of National Reconciliation was put in place in 2003, the perception among some Muslims that the Government discriminates against their community with respect to employment, especially senior government positions, has lessened. For example, Muslims occupy the Prime Ministership, the High Chancellorship, and the National Assembly Presidency. Also, 12 of the 41 Ministers are Muslims.

In past years, the Government paid for the construction of Catholic cathedrals in the business and administrative district of Abidjan. In 1994, the Government directed the construction of the Plateau Mosque in central Abidjan, to be financed with the help of governments or government-affiliated religious organizations of some largely Islamic Arab countries. The project remained unfinished at the end of the period covered by this report. According to a Ministry of Religion official and the Islamic National Council (CNI), there was no significant progress on the mosque construction because funding from Islamic countries decreased due to the instability in the country.

The Government observes major Muslim and Christian religious holidays. The recognized Muslim holy days are Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Layla tul-Qadr, and the Prophet Muhammed's birthday. The recognized Christian holy days are Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, and All Saints' Day.

The law requires religious groups to register with the Government. In accordance with the 1960 law governing associations, all religious groups wishing to operate in the country must submit to the Ministry of Territorial Administration a file including the group's bylaws, the names of the founding members, the date of founding (or the date on which the founder received the revelation of his or her calling), general assembly minutes, the names of members of the administrative board, and other information. The Ministry of Territorial Administration consults with the Ministry of Religion and investigates through the Ministry of Security the backgrounds of the founding members to determine that the group has no politically subversive purpose. No religious group has complained of arbitrary registration procedures or problems with gaining government recognition. The Government does not register traditional indigenous religious groups; such groups are not formally organized and none have applied for registration or recognition.

The Government grants no tax or other benefits to religious groups; however, some religious groups have gained some favors after individual negotiations. Examples include reductions in the cost of resident alien registration, customs exemptions on certain religious items, diplomatic passports for major religious chiefs, and, in some cases, privileges similar to those of diplomats. No particular religion is favored consistently in this manner.

Foreign missionaries must meet the same requirements as any foreigner, including registering as resident aliens and obtaining national identification cards. There were no reports that foreign missionaries were denied such registration arbitrarily.

Religious instruction is permitted in public schools and usually is offered after normal class hours. Established Islamic, Catholic, and Protestant groups, including evangelical churches, offer religious instruction. While a government decree that allows only Catholic and Protestant teachings in schools exists, it no longer is enforced. The Government continued to subsidize both Roman Catholic and other Christian schools, although less than in the past because of the prevailing economic crisis. The Government did not subsidize Muslim schools. During the period covered by this report, the Government allotted approximately \$100,000 to 20 major religious associations to assist with various costs and projects; the allocation was based on the number of followers of each association.

During the period covered by this report, the Government took positive steps to promote interfaith understanding. Government officials, including the President and his religious advisers, appear at major religious celebrations and events organized by a wide variety of faiths and groups. The Government often invites leaders of various religious communities, including the Mediation Committee for National Reconciliation, the Forum of Religious Confessions, and the Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace to attend official ceremonies and to sit on deliberative and advisory committees. The Government also invited these groups, along with representatives from all sectors of civil society, to give their viewpoints on the Pretoria agreement that was signed in April 2005 between the Government and rebel groups controlling the northern part of the country. The Government does not generally invite traditional indigenous religious groups to the ceremonies or committee meetings. In August 2004, the Minister of Religion traveled to England to participate in the 38th Convention of the Ahmadiya Islamic Community.

During the period covered by this report, some Muslim leaders claimed that many state institutions, particularly the national television and radio stations, were domi-

nated by Christian programming, including broadcasts of the Catholic Mass, choirs, religious services, and Christian music. Specifically, the Islamic National Council and the Muslim community questioned why Catholics had more than 10 radio frequencies, while Muslims had only 1 frequency. However, Muslim leaders appear on state television and have their own weekly television show, although it occupies a less favorable programming slot at a late hour.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government monitors minority religious groups for signs of political activity it considers subversive. There were few reports of government surveillance of religious groups.

In the past, the Government informally favored the Roman Catholic Church, and Catholic Church leaders have had a much stronger voice in government affairs than their Islamic counterparts, which has led to feelings of disenfranchisement among some in the Muslim population. However, President Gbagbo continued to meet with Muslims leaders to discuss their concerns.

Some Muslims believe their religious or ethnic affiliations made them targets of government discrimination with regard to both employment and national identity card renewals. Due to the tense political situation in the country and the ethnic and religious divisions along which political party lines are drawn, some Muslims continue to be scrutinized more closely in the identity card application process. The national identity card issue is contentious as it has not been clear for several years which persons are required to have which card (citizen/noncitizen) and how the cards are to be distributed. As most Ivoirian Muslims share names, style of dress, and customs with several of the country's predominantly Muslim neighboring countries, citizens sometimes are wrongly accused of attempting to obtain nationality cards illegally. Some noncitizens from neighboring, predominantly Muslim countries, accuse the Government of delaying or not processing their naturalization cases. Some persons, particularly northerners and foreigners, complain that security forces have harassed them for having the wrong identity cards or not having an identity card. The LMA calls for the resolution of the national identity question and improved implementation of naturalization laws to ensure that citizenship is granted in an equitable manner to qualified persons. This problem was not resolved during the period covered by this report.

Northern citizens also complained that when applying for passports or national identity cards, they were asked to provide more documents than applicants from southern ethnic groups. There were also reports that police officers confiscated or destroyed identity cards of northern citizens, telling northerners they should apply for a "resident permit" (*carte de séjour*), which is normally given to foreigners only. In addition, security forces were more likely to extract bribes at checkpoints from northerners and foreigners than from southern citizens.

Muslims often struggled for state benefits that came more easily to practitioners of other religions. For example, Catholic and Protestant schools are regarded as official schools supervised by the Ministry of Education and subsidized by the Government. The Government allows Islamic schools that follow an official curriculum, but it does not subsidize them.

Using state funds budgeted each fiscal year for the President's discretionary use, President Gbagbo authorized payment for 210 Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in 2005. However, some Muslim organizations continue to view the Government's strict financial and organizational requirements for Hajj pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia as unnecessary and unwarranted interference since churches organize several Christian pilgrimages throughout the year without government supervision. In 2003, the Islamic Umma Front (FOI) and the National Trade Union of Couriers asked the Government to liberalize the Hajj process so that pilgrims could organize the trips without government involvement. A Ministry of Religion official stated the Government must be involved in the organization of Hajj as it involves 3,000 to 4,000 citizens leaving the country each year. Some Muslim organizations feel that the Government tries to garner support by rewarding Muslims they view as loyal by paying for their pilgrimage to Mecca.

Traditional indigenous religions rarely are included in official or unofficial lists of the country's religions. There is no generally accepted system for classifying the country's diverse traditional religious practices, which vary not only by ethnic group but also by region, village, family, gender, and age group. In addition, members of the country's largely Christian or Islamic urban elite, which effectively control the State, generally appeared disinclined to allow traditional indigenous religions the social status accorded to Christianity and Islam. However, at the beginning of important ceremonies, traditional chiefs very often were invited to participate in tradi-

tional libation ceremonies aimed at recognizing ancestors. President Gbagbo also meets frequently with traditional chiefs to listen to their concerns.

The Government does not prohibit links to foreign coreligionists, but it informally discourages connections with politically radical fundamentalist movements, such as Islamic groups based in Iran or Libya.

Christian members of the military are offered access to chaplains and Muslim members are allowed time to pray. Since Muslim military members led the 2002 attempted coup, Muslims in the military generally keep a low profile.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There have been no arrests for the 2003 killings of Mamadou Ganame, a Qur'anic instructor in the southeast; Imam Mahmoud Samassi, founder and Imam of the Lycee Technique Mosque in Abidjan; Mohamed Sangare, assistant imam for the Adobo Mosque in Abidjan; and Mory Fanny Cisse, an Islamic preacher. There were no arrests in the February 2004 incident in which someone shot at five imams of the executive committee of the High Council of Imams.

In the rebel-held north and west, the situation for Christian religious groups appeared to have improved. The Bishop of Yopougon reported that to his knowledge, Catholics and other Christians were free to practice as they wished in the rebel-held zones. In April 2005, the Bishop of Korhogo celebrated the first century of the Catholic Church in Korhogo, a town in the zone under control of the New Forces. The ceremony was attended by more than 30 priests and 4 Bishops who went to Korhogo for the occasion. The Papal Nuncio who attended the ceremony congratulated the Ivorian Bishops and the European priests and nuns who remained in the rebel-held zone on their continued work in spite of the war situation.

Unlike in the previous 12-month period, there were no new reports of attacks on churches.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses by terrorist organizations targeted at specific religions during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In November 2004, the Ministry of Religion invited all religious groups to create the Collective of the Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace. The collective was formed shortly after a seminar sponsored by the U.S. Embassy and is presided over by the Bishop of Yopougon. The Vice President is the President of the Forum of Religious Confessions and leader of the Celestial Christian Church, Blin Jacob Ediem. The goal of the collective is to bring together the main protagonists of the crisis and renew a dialogue to teach humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation to create a lasting peace.

Since the inception of the religious collective, a steering committee composed of representatives from the religious groups has been meeting regularly. They have met with various officials, including the Prime Minister, the President, and members of the Forces Nouvelles, to re-engage the actors in the peace process. Unlike the Forum, which does not include some religious groups such as the evangelical churches, the collective includes all the religious groups. During January and February 2005, the collective called on all the major political parties and leaders to promote dialogue.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the various religious groups became strained after the outbreak of the 2002 national crisis; there is some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of traditional indigenous religions.

Some persons consider all Muslims to be foreigners or fundamentalists and sometimes refer to Muslims as "destabilizing forces." Some political parties and religious representatives have made similar statements in order to use religious divisions to further political interests.

Muslims frequently experienced discrimination because of their presumed support for the presidential candidacy of former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim, or because of their ethnic origin. Although many northern Muslims supported the presidential candidacy of Ouattara and the RDR opposition party, some Muslims

of northern origin have remained loyal to President Gbagbo's FPI party throughout the crisis.

Followers of traditional indigenous religions also are subject to societal discrimination. Some Christians and Muslims refuse to associate with practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Many Christian or Islamic leaders disparage practitioners of traditional indigenous religions as "pagans" or practitioners of "black magic." Although the purported practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft" is widely feared, traditional indigenous religions discourage such practices.

Many practitioners of traditional indigenous religions are unaware of or do not consider themselves victims of societal discrimination and do not complain about their treatment.

Conflicts between and within religious groups have surfaced occasionally. For more than 15 years, the Celestial Christians have been divided because of a leadership struggle. In June 2003, a clash between rival leaders Blin Jacob Ediemou and Louis Akeble Zagadou over the ownership of a church led to the arrest of six men; they were later released. In September 2003, the Minister of Religion sent a delegation to Nigeria and Benin to consult with Celestial Christian leaders. In an attempt to end the Church's religious dispute, and with the support of the Ministry of Religion, World Celestial Christian leader Pastor Benoit Agbaossi came to Abidjan in April 2005 and inaugurated Blin Jacob Ediemou as the Celestial Christian leader for the country. Zagadou continued to challenge Ediemou's authority.

The Minister of Religion took an active role in settling the 11-year-old leadership conflict within the Messianic Church that started after the death of founder Prophet Meledge Edjro Josue. The Ministry conducted a mission from October 2003 to March 2004 in the southern Leboutou region, interviewing various members and leaders of the church before successfully ending the mediation in August. On August 15, 2004, the two factions agreed to form a joint board of administration to manage the Messianic Church, thus reconciling the Church members.

Relations between Muslims and Christians, specifically Catholics, improved during the period covered by this report. Religious leaders continued to attend each other's main religious celebrations, setting an example of reconciliation for their respective communities.

Prior to the crisis, there were examples of long-standing interfaith cooperation. The cooperation has resumed to a lesser extent during the period covered by this report. Once a year, on New Year's Eve, members of all Christian religious groups gather in the National Stadium in Abidjan for a nightlong vigil and prayer. When serious social problems arose, simultaneous Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim prayer ceremonies were held in churches, temples, and mosques to ask for divine assistance. Kouassi-Datekro, a town in the Akan region in the eastern part of the country, is famous for ecumenical events involving simultaneous prayer services of all faiths. Religious leaders from diverse groups assembled on their own initiative to mediate in times of political conflict; however, no leaders of traditional indigenous religious groups were included.

The Forum of Religious Confessions endeavors to promote dialogue, increase understanding, and improve the relationships among religious leaders and groups and is headed by the leader of the Celestial Christian Church. The Research Group in Democracy and Social and Economic Development of Cote d'Ivoire (GERDDES-CI) created the forum, which includes leaders of many of the country's religious groups, including Catholics, Muslims, various Protestant groups, several syncretist groups, the Association of Traditional Priests, and the Bossonists, an association of indigenous Akan religious priests. The Ministry of Religion cooperates closely and regularly with the forum.

The GERDDES-CI also helped create the Collective of Civil Society for Peace (CCSP), which has worked since the beginning of the 2002 crisis to promote national reconciliation. Some observers believe that the CCSP's work helped prevent the national crisis from turning into a religious war.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government emphasizes religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since the onset of the crisis, the U.S. Embassy has assisted efforts by the Government and nongovernmental organizations to mitigate religious tensions in the country. The U.S. Ambassador and other U.S. Government officials regularly meet with religious leaders. In February 2005, in cooperation with the Embassy, the Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace organized a round table of the religious groups that the political leaders of the major political parties attended. An imam and a priest were the main lecturers.

On December 1, 2004, the Ambassador hosted a meeting for religious leaders. After the meeting, at the invitation of the Minister of Religion and with the strong support of the Ambassador, the religious groups met to form the Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace. On February 21, 2005, the Embassy and the U.N. Development Program organized a roundtable entitled "My Share of the Sacrifice for Peace and Reconciliation in Cote d'Ivoire." More than 100 religious and political leaders, journalists, and members of civil society attended. The Ambassador served as moderator, and speakers included imams, pastors, and a professor of theology. The roundtable provided a forum for interfaith dialogue and a constructive debate on the specific contribution that religious leaders could make to solve the political crisis in the country.

The Embassy also hosted an Iftar for Islamic leaders, at which the Ambassador and other embassy officials discussed with the guests how religious leaders could help resolve the conflict. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy presented a speaking program entitled "U.S. Society and Political Process: A Project for Emerging Muslim Leaders." Embassy officials also met with the CNI, the Forum of Religious Confessions, and the Collective of Religious Confessions for National Reconciliation and Peace. The Forum of Religious Confessions was started before the crisis with the help of Embassy funds, and the Embassy continued to support its activities.

DJIBOUTI

The Constitution, while declaring Islam to be the state religion, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, proselytizing is discouraged.

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 the society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 8,450 square miles and a population of approximately 650,000. More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. There are a small number of Catholics, Protestants, and followers of the Baha'i Faith, together accounting for less than 1 percent of the population. There are no known practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Because all citizens officially are considered Muslims if they do not adhere to another faith, there are no figures available on the number of atheists in the country.

The sizable foreign community supports Roman Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches.

A small number of foreign Christian missionary groups operate in the country, including the Eastern Mennonite Mission, Red Sea Team International, and Life International.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, while declaring Islam to be the state religion, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, proselytizing is discouraged. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Although Islam is the state religion, the Government imposes no sanctions on those who choose to ignore Islamic teachings or to practice other faiths. The Government maintains diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

The Shari'a Court has been replaced by the Family Court, which was practically implemented in February 2004. This court uses laws from both the Family Code and Shari'a to rule on matters related to the family such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

The Government requires that religious groups register with the Ministry of the Interior by submitting an application to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which, along with the Ministry of the Interior, investigates the group. Once approved, the

group signs an initial 2-year bilateral agreement detailing the scope of the group's activities. Unlike in previous years, Baha'i members reported no incidents of discrimination but did not confirm whether the organization submitted a request for registration during the period covered by this report. In previous years, such requests have been refused.

Foreign clergy and missionaries are permitted to perform charitable works and to sell religious books. These groups, which focus on humanitarian services in the education and health sectors, reportedly faced no harassment during the period covered by this report. Foreign missionary groups are licensed by the Government to operate schools. Religion is not taught in public schools.

The country observes the Muslim holidays of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, the Islamic New Year, and the Ascension of the Prophet as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There is no legal prohibition against proselytizing; however, proselytizing is discouraged for non-Muslims.

Islamic law based on the Qur'an is used only with regard to family matters and is administered by the Family Court judges. Civil marriage is permitted only for non-Muslim foreigners. Muslims are required to marry in a religious ceremony, and a non-Muslim man may marry a Muslim woman only after converting to Islam.

The Ministry of Muslim Affairs monitors the activities of Muslims, but it does not restrict their religious practices. The Ministry of Muslim Affairs has authority in all Islamic matters, including mosques, religious schools, and religious events. The High Islamic Council, officially established within the Ministry in October 2004, is mandated to give advice on all religious issues and concerns. It also is in charge of coordinating all Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country.

The President is required to take a religious oath at inauguration; however, other government employees are not required to do so.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches as well as some nongovernmental organizations noted an increase in animosity towards non-Muslims in recent years. Moderate Muslim clerics attribute the rise in Islamic fundamentalism in part to the international media, Saudi Wahhabi schools, the growing number of Islamic groups, and graduates of Saudi Arabian or Yemeni Islamic schools.

French Catholics and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians have been part of Djibouti society for almost a century and are an example of the considerable familiarity with and tolerance of other faiths by the Muslim majority. There are no legal repercussions for conversion from Islam to another religion or for marrying outside of Islam; however, converts may face negative societal, tribal, and familial attitudes towards their decision.

Approximately 60 percent of the population is ethnically Somali. In the ethnic Somali community, clan membership has more influence over a person's life than does religion. Ethnic Somalis who are Christians often are buried according to Islamic traditions by relatives who do not recognize their non-Muslim faith.

There is no formal interfaith dialogue. The Catholic Church organizes an annual celebration with all the other Christian churches. The Qadi has received Ramadan greetings from the Pope. He meets with the heads of other faiths only at government-organized ceremonies.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

riodically meet with leaders and members of religious communities and with U.S. nongovernmental organizations with a missionary component.

The U.S. Embassy hosted several Iftars during Ramadan and a Christmas lunch to promote religious tolerance and understanding. Guests included prominent women in society, military counterparts, influential businessmen and government officials, members of the Arab business and diplomatic community, and Embassy employees. The Embassy has engaged several of its English Language Discussion Groups in discussions of religious freedom and tolerance. In cooperation with the religiously affiliated association Al-Biri, the Embassy also organized a Ramadan Information Session to educate American military supervisors of local staff working at Camp Lemonier on the customs and practices of Ramadan.

EQUATORIAL 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. Because of perceived government sensitivity and possible repercussions, religious groups practice self-censorship regarding criticism of the Government.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,827 square miles, and the Government estimates the population is approximately 1 million (other sources estimate the population to be approximately 586,000.) Christians account for approximately 93 percent of the population, and 5 percent of the population practices traditional indigenous religions. In addition, Muslims, members of the Baha'i Faith, practitioners of other religions, and those who are atheist each comprise less than 1 percent of the population. Roman Catholicism is the principal religion, dating to the Spanish colonial period, when almost the entire population was baptized into the faith. Catholics comprise approximately 87 percent of the population, and an estimated 4.5 percent belongs to Protestant denominations. Many Catholics reportedly also follow traditional beliefs. Christian worship is concentrated in the more urbanized areas. Although in the past there was no known organized Christian worship in remote rural areas, both Catholic and Protestant church leaders report expansion into interior regions.

Foreign missionary groups operate, both on Bioko Island and the mainland. These include Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Nondenominational evangelical Christian groups are also present, including those who translate the Bible into indigenous languages.

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 Government remains sensitive to any criticism, and church leaders usually avoid discussions that could be construed as critical of the Government or government officials.

The Government generally allows preaching, religious teaching, education, and practice by believers. The Government requires permission for any activities outside the confines of places of worship; however, in practice, this requirement does not appear to hinder organized religious groups.

A 1992 Presidential decree regulates the exercise of religious freedom. This decree maintains an official preference for the Catholic Church and the Reform Church of Equatorial Guinea, due to their traditional roots and pervasive influence in the social and cultural life of the populace. While the decree does not hinder the practice of other religions, its effects can be observed in many events throughout the country; for example, Roman Catholic Masses serve as a normal part of any major ceremonial function, such as the October 12 National Day. In addition, Catholic and Reform church officials are exempt from airport entry and exit taxes.

The decree regulates the registration of religious groups. To register, churches must submit a written application to the Ministry of Justice and Worship. The Director General in the Ministry of Justice and Worship oversees compliance with the decree and the registration process. This application was not required of the Catholic and Reform churches.

The application and approval process may take several years, but such delay appears to be the result of bureaucratic inefficiency and not of a policy designed to impede any religious group. Enforcement of registration requirements is inconsistent. Unregistered groups operating in the country can be fined; however, such fines are rarely applied.

The exact number of registered denominations is not publicly available.

Religious study is required in schools and is usually, but not exclusively, Catholic.

Religious leaders indicated that they knew of no steps by the Government to promote an interfaith dialogue between different faiths. However, Protestant churches report a positive dialogue and generally good relations between the various Protestant denominations.

Foreign missionaries work throughout the country, generally without impediment.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government and President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo's ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) reacted defensively to any criticism by the clergy. The Government continued unofficially to restrict freedom of expression of the clergy by emphasizing that the role of religion is spiritual, not political. Permission had been granted for a new radio station to operate, but only to broadcast religious programs.

Government agents, including the President, occasionally make official and unofficial visits to observe church behavior or request a timetable of church activities. The Government requires permission for any religious or faith-based social assistance activity outside the confines of places of worship; however, in practice this requirement did not appear to hinder organized religious groups.

While there is no reported workplace discrimination targeted against a particular faith, some non-Catholic pastors who also work for the Government as civil servants maintain a low profile in the workplace with regard to their religious affiliation. Some reported that supervisors informed them of the requirement to participate in religious activities related to their government positions, including attending religious events such as Catholic Masses at government functions.

In April 2004, during legislative and municipal elections, security forces and the former mayor of Malabo, the capital, threatened a missionary pastor who had removed party campaign posters of the ruling party from the walls of his church. The mayor accused the missionary of being a "terrorist" and threatened to put him in jail. He also threatened to turn off the church's electricity and water services. No action was taken against the missionary, due to the intercession of his local colleagues. Ruling party supporters again placed posters on the church walls and neither the missionary nor any church member removed the newly installed posters. The mayor was later replaced, reportedly for a pattern of decisions that did not reflect well on the Government.

The country's fundamental law on religion states that each person is free to study his or her own religion and should not be forced to study another faith. Children of all faiths are allowed to enroll in the Catholic-influenced schools; however, they are expected to participate in daily Catholic religious lessons and prayers. In practice, for non-Catholics access to study in one's own faith generally is not possible. For example, a Protestant church official cited difficulties when enrolling his child at school. He had requested that a teacher of the child's own faith be made available, but the school official claimed there was a lack of funds and stated that he could provide the teacher only if the child's church was willing to pay the teacher's salary.

Catholic missionaries reportedly receive residence permits shortly after their arrival; other persons receive permits after a delay of 2 to 3 months.

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 were abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, some non-Catholic religious groups believe that they face societal pressures within their regions. Such concerns may reflect ethnic or individual differences as much as religious differences.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy in Malabo reopened in late 2003. Together with the U.S. Embassy based in Yaounde, Cameroon and the U.S. Consular Agent based in the mainland city of Bata, the Embassy in Malabo maintains contact with religious groups and monitors religious initiatives.

During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy representatives met with various church and missionary leaders, as well as with government officials in the Ministry of Justice and Worship.

ERITREA

The Constitution, which the Government has not implemented, provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government severely restricted this right for all but the four government approved religions—Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Catholics, and the Evangelical Church of Eritrea (affiliated with the Lutheran World Federation), which together represent the vast majority of the population. Oftentimes, treatment of religious minorities varied depending on the attitudes of local authorities.

The Government's already poor record on freedom for minority religious groups continued to worsen during the period covered by this report. The Government harassed, arrested, and detained members of Pentecostal and other independent evangelical groups, reform movements from and within the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses. There were also numerous reports of attempts to force recantations. While there were no reports of torture of religious detainees during the reporting period, some religious detainees were held in harsh conditions that included extreme temperature fluctuations with limited or no access to family. Following a 2002 government decree that all religious groups must register or cease all religious activities, the Government closed all religious facilities not belonging to the four religions approved of and subsequently registered by the Government. These closures, the Government's failure to register any of the groups that had applied for registration, and the restriction on holding religious meetings, which was arbitrarily enforced, continued through the period covered by this report.

Citizens generally are tolerant of one another in the practice of their religion. However, societal attitudes toward Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostal groups are an exception. There also were reports that some individuals encouraged harassment of these religious groups and reported their activities to the Government.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In September 2004, the Secretary of State designated Eritrea as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 48,489 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.6 million. Although reliable statistics are not available, it is estimated that 60 percent of the population is Sunni and 30 percent is Orthodox Christian. The population also includes a small number of Roman Catholics (about 5 percent), Protestants (about 2 percent), smaller numbers of Seventh-day Adventists, and fewer than 1,500 Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 2 percent practice traditional indigenous religions. Also present in very small numbers are practicing Buddhists, Hindus, and Baha'is (less than 1 percent). The population in the eastern and western lowlands is predominantly Muslim and in the highlands is predominantly Christian. There are very few atheists. Religious participation is high among all ethnic groups.

Within geographic and ethnic groups, the majority of the Tigrinya are Orthodox Christian, with the exception of the Djiberti Tigrinya, who are Muslim. Most members of the Tigre, Saho, Nara, Afar, Rashaida, Beja, and Blen ethnic groups are

Muslim. Approximately 40 percent of the Blen are Christian, the majority being Roman Catholic. More than half of the Kunama are Catholic, with a large minority of Muslims and some who practice traditional indigenous religions. The central and southern highlands, which are generally more developed than the lowlands, are populated predominantly by Christian Tigrinyas as well as some Muslim Djiberti Tigrinya and Saho. The Afar and Rashaida, as well as some Saho and Tigre, live in the eastern lowlands. The Blen live on the border between the western lowlands and the central highlands and are concentrated in the Keren area, which also includes a significant minority of Tigre and Tigrinya speakers. The Beja, Kunama, Nara, and most Tigre live in the western lowlands.

Foreign missionaries operate, including representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim faiths. Some missionaries and representatives of the restricted unregistered religious groups are present but keep a low profile for fear of abuse of their congregations. There also are several international faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that provide humanitarian aid, including Mercy Corps, Caritas, Norwegian Church Aid, Lutheran World Federation, Samaritan's Purse, Catholic Relief Services, and the Islamic Mufti's Relief Organization.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government drafted and approved a Constitution in 1997 that provides the freedom to practice any religion; however, the Government has not yet implemented its provisions. The Government severely restricted this right in the case of numerous small Protestant churches, the Baha'is, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 2002, the Minister of Information issued a decree that all religions except for the Eritrean Orthodox Church, Islam, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church must fill out registration applications and cease religious activities and services until these applications were approved. Registration requirements include a description of the history of the religious group in the country, explanation of the "uniqueness" or benefit that the group offers compared with other religious groups already present, names and personal information of religious leaders, detailed information on assets and property owned by the group, and sources of funding from abroad. A government committee reviews the applications, which in theory are to be approved only if they conform to local culture.

The Government approved no registrations during the period covered by this report, despite the fact that four religious groups fully complied with registration requirements over 3 years ago and continued to inquire with the concerned government offices. Several religious groups have complied partially with the registration requirements, and some have chosen not to submit any documentation. The country's representative at the U.N.'s Commission on Human Rights stated on April 5 that the Seventh-day Adventist Church's registration application would be "finalized in the near future." The Church's application had not been approved by the end of the period covered by this report.

The four government-registered religious groups were not required to fill out the same registration forms as other groups, and their services and activities were allowed to continue. They have been requested to provide to the Government an accounting of their financial sources, as well as lists of personnel and real property, and have reportedly done so.

A presidential decree declaring that Jehovah's Witnesses had "forsaken their nationality" by refusing to vote or perform required military service continued to result in economic, employment, and travel difficulties for many members of the group, especially former civil servants and merchants.

Any religious organization that seeks facilities for worship other than private homes must obtain government approval to build such facilities.

Religious organizations, including faith-based NGOs, do not receive duty-free privileges, although they sometimes are allowed to import items under the reduced duty structure used for companies.

The following holy days are recognized as official holidays by the Government: Christmas (both Orthodox and non-Orthodox), Epiphany (Christian), Eid al-Adha (Muslim), Good Friday (Christian), Easter (Christian), the Prophet Muhammed's birthday (Muslim), New Year (Orthodox), Meskel (Orthodox), and Eid al-Fitr (Muslim).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Islam and Orthodox Christianity are practiced widely and are for the most part tolerated, with persons allowed to worship freely. There is a centuries-old history of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between Christianity and Islam in the country.

Following the 2002 government decree that certain religious groups must register or cease all religious activities, religious facilities not belonging to the four government-approved religious groups were forced to close. Authorities in the Office of Religious Affairs told religious groups that home prayer meetings would be permitted, but the government did not fully respect this guidance during the reporting period. They were also informed that a standing law would be used to prevent un-registered religious groups from holding political or other gatherings in private homes of more than three to five persons. In practice, authorities arbitrarily enforce this law.

Authorities generally have not hindered the four groups that filled out their registration applications in 2002—the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Faith Mission Church, and the Baha'i Faith—in holding home prayer or private study meetings, although like other unregistered groups their houses of worship remain closed, and they are not permitted to meet in public settings. Religious groups such as the Kale Hiwot (Baptists), Full Gospel Church, and Meserete Kristos (Mennonite) Church have complied with some, but not all, of the registration requirements. Treatment of these and other unregistered religious groups often varied depending on the locale. Some local authorities allow unregistered groups to worship in homes or rented spaces whereas others do not allow them to meet at all.

The Government closely monitors the activities and movements of unregistered religious groups and members, including nonreligious social functions attended by members. The Government also closed down an Orthodox congregation known as Medhane Alem, whose religious beliefs or services it did not approve of, and continued to harass its members, placing some in prolonged detention. In October 2004, three men that the Government considered to be organizers were jailed without charges and remain in detention.

In 2003, the Government denied visa applications for representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses who applied to travel to the country to meet with their congregations or discuss religious freedom issues with government officials.

A 1995 proclamation bans religious organizations from involvement in politics and restricts the right of religious media to comment on political matters. No religious groups—registered or unregistered—are allowed to produce religious periodicals. The Office of Religious Affairs within the Office of the Presidency monitors compliance with these proscriptions.

All religious entities must receive authorization from the Office of Religious Affairs to print and distribute documents. The Office of Religious Affairs routinely approves requests for authorization from registered groups and four unregistered churches; however, other unregistered churches have been unable to obtain authorization to print documents for distribution within their congregations. On March 22, authorities reportedly closed a printing shop for 2 days and seized an unregistered church's printed materials that had not been approved by the Office of Religious Affairs.

Faith-based organizations are permitted to fund, but not initiate or implement, development projects; however, this proclamation was not enforced in practice. Several religious organizations executed small-scale development projects without government interference. The proclamation also set out rules governing relations between religious organizations and foreign sponsors.

The military has no chaplains. Military personnel are free to worship at nearby houses of worship for the four registered religions. Military members reportedly are sometimes allowed to possess certain religious books to pray privately in their barracks but not in groups. Several members of unregistered religious groups reportedly were arrested for violating this rule.

The Government also forbids what it deems to be radical forms of Islam. Most foreign Muslim preachers are not allowed to proselytize, and funding of Islamic missionary or religious activities is controlled.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There are numerous credible reports that several hundred members of unregistered religious groups have been detained or imprisoned at various times since 2002. During the reporting period, there were reliable reports that authorities detained at least 500 members of unregistered religious groups without charges. Many were released after detentions of several days or less, but some spent longer periods in confinement without charges and without access to legal counsel. Government restrictions make it difficult to determine the precise number of religious prisoners, but the number of long-term prisoners continues to grow.

Individuals who are jailed for reasons of faith are reportedly held at various locations, including facilities administered by the military, such as at Mai Sewa outside the capital, and the more distant Sawa, as well as police stations inside Asmara and

other cities. Detainees are not formally charged or accorded due process, and generally do not have access to their families. While many are ostensibly jailed for evasion of military conscription, significant numbers are being held solely for their religious beliefs and some are held in harsh conditions that include extreme temperature fluctuations.

The Government does not excuse individuals who object to military conscription for religious reasons or reasons of conscience and does not allow alternative national service. Based on their religious beliefs, most members of Jehovah's Witnesses have refused to participate in national military service or to vote. Some Muslims also have objected to universal national service because of the requirement that Muslim women must perform military duty.

Although members of several religious groups, including Muslims, reportedly have been imprisoned in past years for failure to participate in national military service, the Government has singled out Jehovah's Witnesses for harsher treatment than that received by followers of other faiths for similar actions. Jehovah's Witnesses who did not participate in national military service have been subject to dismissal from the civil service, revocation of their business licenses, eviction from government-owned housing, and denial of passports, identity cards, and exit visas. They are also prohibited from having their marriages legalized by the civil authorities.

In conducting searches for national military service evaders, security forces have targeted gatherings of unregistered religious groups with a frequency not characteristic of its treatment of other groups' social gatherings or religious services, including those of the four government-approved religions.

There were relatively few arrests during home prayer or Bible study meetings reported in the first half of the reporting period, but the trend toward large-scale arrests at socio-religious gatherings and harassment of individuals resumed in the second half.

The following is a sampling of reports from individual religious leaders, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, NGOs, and family members of detainees.

In December 2004, security forces reportedly detained 60 members of the Rema Church in Asmara while they were participating in a home prayer meeting. A total of 25 of the detainees were released within 48 hours and 22 were released shortly thereafter. The remaining 13 detainees, including a pastor in his 70s, are reportedly being held at a prison in Mai Sewa, in the Maekel Region.

On January 9, 2005, security forces detained 25 former Roman Catholic Church members known as "Tahadesso" (reformist) in Asmara during a wedding rehearsal. While 22 were eventually released, three remained incarcerated in Wi'a at the end of the reporting period.

On January 9, authorities reportedly detained 115 members of the Full Gospel Church and the Kaile Hiwot Church in Barentu at a double-wedding ceremony. A total of 67 of these members were allegedly detained at the Sawa military training facility in the west and were released on April 13. The remaining 48 members, who are of national service age, are reportedly being detained for national service evasion and are being held at a military facility near the town of Barentu.

On January 21, security officials reportedly arrested four persons, of whom three are senior pastors of the Full Gospel Church, at the Church's offices in Asmara. The three pastors—Kidane Ghebremeskel, Abraham Belay, and Samuel Tesfamichael—reportedly remain jailed in Asmara. The fourth individual was reportedly released after 1 month of detention.

On January 30, authorities detained 45 members of the Full Gospel Church during home prayer meetings in two neighborhoods of Asmara (Adi Guadad and Mai Chot). One member, who was reportedly under the age of 18, was released after one night of detention. Sixteen members who were reportedly evading national service are being held in Mai Sewa. The remaining 28 detainees were reportedly released after several weeks.

On February 4, security forces reportedly arrested 14 members of the Kaile Hiwot Church during a home Bible study meeting at Adi Tekelzan, located between the cities of Asmara and Keren. Thirteen of the members were allegedly evading national service and are being held at Mai Sewa prison, along with their pastor, Issa Mekonnen, who is not of national service age.

On February 12, authorities reportedly detained 15 women belonging to the Medhane Alem congregation for approximately 1 month for holding a home prayer meeting in Keren. All agreed to sign, as a condition of their release, a document stating that they would not take part in their congregation's activities in the future.

On February 16, security officials reportedly detained 17 members of the Rema Church at a home prayer meeting in Adi Quala. Ten members were reportedly re-

leased after 2 weeks, while the remaining seven are being held in Gelalo for national service evasion.

On February 19, security forces reportedly detained 27 students and teachers of the Medhane Alem congregation in Asmara. Five teachers, who are also instructors at the University of Asmara, are reportedly being held at Mai Sewa, while the 22 students were released to their parents on February 20.

On May 28, security forces detained more than 200 persons who had gathered at a private reception hall for a marriage organized by the Kaile Hiwot Church in Asmara. Once in custody, they were reportedly separated into groups belonging to registered and unregistered churches. Those belonging to registered churches were released within three days after signing agreements not to take part in religious activities of unregistered groups. Members of unregistered churches were required to sign a statement prior to their release that they would join one of the government-authorized churches. Jehovah's Witnesses picked up in the raid are reportedly still being held for refusing to recant their faith. There were reportedly 88 persons, of whom 35 were women, who were still being held at the end of the reporting period.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been singled out for particularly harsh treatment. According to credible sources, a total of 22 Jehovah's Witnesses are being held without charges or trial, at least 9 of whom are being detained for allegedly failing to perform national military service. At the end of the period covered by this report, eight Jehovah's Witnesses, most of whom had been arrested in June 2004, remained detained at the Mai Sewa facility. These Jehovah's Witnesses are all above the cut-off age for national service eligibility, which is 40 for men and 27 for women.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been jailed in harsh conditions for varying periods, at least three for more than 10 years, reportedly for evading compulsory military service; however, the maximum legal penalty for refusing to perform national service is 3 years. Ministry of Justice officials have denied that any Jehovah's Witnesses are in detention without charge, although they acknowledge that some of them and a number of Muslims were jailed for evading national service.

Of the approximately 40 Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly arrested in January 2004 while praying in a private home in Asmara, 3 who ranged in age from 55 to 94 were released in September, 2004. Nearly all of the remainder were reportedly released during the reporting period.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports that the security forces tortured those detained for their religious beliefs, although detention conditions were sometimes harsh. There were, however, credible reports that some of the detainees were required to sign statements as a condition of release renouncing or agreeing not to practice their faith or, in a small number of cases, to "return to the faith of their fathers," which some detainees took to mean becoming a member of the Orthodox Church. In some cases in which detainees refused to sign such documents, relatives were asked to do so on their behalf.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were reports that police forced some adherents of unregistered religious groups to sign statements that they would abandon their faith and return to the Orthodox Church.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Citizens generally are tolerant of one another in the practice of their religion, particularly among the four government-registered religious groups. Mosques and the principal Christian churches coexist throughout the country, although Islam tends to predominate in the lowlands and Christianity in the highlands. In Asmara, Christian and Muslim holidays are respected by all religions. Some holidays are celebrated jointly.

Societal attitudes toward Jehovah's Witnesses and some Pentecostal groups are an exception to this general tolerance. Jehovah's Witnesses generally are disliked and face some societal discrimination because of their refusal to participate in the 1993 independence referendum and to perform national military service, a refusal that is widely judged as unpatriotic. There was also social prejudice against other unregistered religious groups. Some persons reportedly cooperated with government authorities by reporting on and harassing members of those groups.

Leaders of the four principal religions meet routinely, enjoy excellent interfaith relations, and engage in efforts to foster cooperation and understanding among their followers. Few religious leaders in the country have taken a strong public stance in defense of freedom of conscience for all faiths.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials meet regularly with leaders of the religious community. They were also able to meet for the first time since 2002 with the Government's Director of Religious Affairs.

The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officers have raised the cases of detention and restrictions on unregistered religious groups with officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and the leaders of the sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

In September 2004, the Secretary of State designated Eritrea as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

ETHIOPIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, on occasion local authorities infringe on this right.

There was little change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Some Protestant and Muslim groups continued to complain that local officials discriminate against them when seeking land for churches, mosques, and cemeteries, but there were reports of good relations between the Ministry of Education and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) regarding the use of headscarves.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In general, there was a decrease in interreligious conflict and clashes; however, government criticism of some Muslim elements increased. There has been some reported tension between traditionalist Muslims and followers of the Wahhabi sect, an interpretation of Islam that reportedly receives support from Saudi Arabia.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 472,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 70.5 million. An estimated 40 to 45 percent of the population belongs to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC); however, the EOC claims 50 percent of the country's total population, or more than 31 million adherents, and 110,450 churches. The EOC is predominant in the northern regions of Tigray and Amhara.

Approximately 45 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, although many Muslims claim that the actual percentage is higher. Addis Ababa, the capital, has approximately one million Muslims, according to the Supreme Islamic Council. Islam is most prevalent in the eastern Somali and Afar regions, as well as in all the major parts of Oromia in the south.

Christian evangelical and Pentecostal groups continue to be the fastest growing faiths and are believed to constitute more than 10 percent of the population. According to the Evangelical Church Fellowship, there are 11.5 million Protestants, although this figure may be high. Established Protestant churches such as Mekane Yesus (with 4.2 million members—reporting an increase of 200,000 members each year) and the Kale Hiwot followers (with about 4.6 million members) are strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Regional State (SNNPR), western and central Oromia, and in urban areas. In Gambella in the west, where ethnic clashes broke out in 2003, Mekane Yesus followers represent 60 percent of the population, according to the President of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus. The Evangelical Church Fellowship claims 22 denominations under their religious umbrella and that the number of adherents increased by 200,000 during the period covered by this report.

There are reportedly more than 7,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. Oriental Rite and Latin Rite Roman Catholics (Roman Catholics number approximately

500,000), Jews, animists, and other practitioners of traditional indigenous religions make up most of the remaining population. In Addis Ababa and western Gondar, in the Amhara region, some claim that their ancestors were forced to convert from Judaism to Ethiopian Orthodoxy (Feles Mora) many centuries ago. There are very few atheists. Although precise data is not available, active participation in religious services is generally high throughout the country.

A large number of foreign missionary groups operate in the country. Protestant organizations, operating under the umbrella of the 22-member Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia, that sponsor or support missionary work include: the Baptist Bible Fellowship; the New Covenant Baptist Church; the Baptist Evangelical Association; Mekane Yesus Church (associated with the Lutheran Church); Kale Hiwot Church (associated with SIM—Service in Mission); Hiwot Berhan Church (associated with the Swedish Philadelphia Church); Genet Church (associated with the Finnish Mission); Lutheran-Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia; Emnet Christos; Muluwongel (Full Gospel) Church; and Messerete Kristos (associated with the Mennonite Mission). Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) also have active missionary operations.

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, on occasion local government authorities infringed on this right. The Constitution requires the separation of state and religion and prohibits a state religion, and the Government generally respects these provisions in practice. In 2003, the Federal Government interfered in the internal affairs of the EIASC by orchestrating the installation of EIASC officials following an internal power struggle.

The Government requires that religious groups be registered. Religious institutions, as with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), are registered with the Ministry of Justice and must renew their registration every 3 years. Churches must also re-register every 3 years. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) stated that this registration requirement reflects a lack of progress or improvement in the Government’s treatment of “newer religions,” specifically Protestant churches.

The EOC has never registered and has never faced ramifications for not registering. Similarly, the Supreme Islamic Council, after registering 8 years ago, has never re-registered since it protested this requirement to the Prime Minister’s Office. Protests from other religious groups over these exceptions have not resulted in equal treatment from the Government. The Roman Catholic Nuncio in the country has written repeatedly to the Prime Minister’s office seeking equal treatment before the law. Mekane Yesus, the Evangelical Fellowship, and Roman Catholics believe that religious churches should be placed in a “different status than NGOs.” However, there was no change in the government policy during the period covered by this report.

Unlike NGOs, religious groups are not subject to the Government’s rigorous registration process. Under the law, any religious organization that undertakes development activities must register its development wing separately as an NGO with the Ministry of Justice. To register, each religious organization must complete an application form and submit a copy of its bylaws, curriculum vitae of the organization’s leader, and a copy of the leader’s identity card. A group’s failure to register results in a denial of legal standing. For example, any organization that did not register with the Ministry of Justice would not be allowed to open a bank account and would be severely disadvantaged in any court proceeding.

Religious groups are not accorded duty-free status. Religious groups are given the free use of government land for churches, schools, hospitals, and cemeteries; however, schools and hospitals, regardless of how long they have been in operation, are subject to government closure and land forfeiture at any time. Religious groups, like private individuals or businesses, must apply to regional and local governments for land allocation. An interfaith effort to promote revision of the law for religious organizations to obtain duty-free status continued.

After complaints that mosques built by squatters had been demolished in 2003, the Addis Ababa Municipality appears to have suspended plans to demolish other mosques built illegally by squatters.

In most interreligious disputes, the Government maintains neutrality and tries to be an impartial arbitrator. Some religious leaders have requested the establishment of a federal institution to deal with religious groups; however, no action had been taken to establish such a federal institution by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government has interpreted the constitutional provision for separation of religion and state to mean that religious instruction is not permitted in schools, whether they are public or private. Schools owned and operated by Catholic, Orthodox, evangelical, and Muslim groups are not allowed to teach religion as a course of study. Most private schools teach morals courses as part of their curricula, and the Government Education Bureau in Addis Ababa has complained that such courses are not free of religious influence. Churches are permitted to have Sunday schools, the Qur'an is taught at mosques, and public schools permit the formation of clubs, including those of a religious nature.

The Government officially recognizes both Christian and Muslim holy days and continues to mandate a 2 hour lunch break on Fridays to allow Muslims to go to a mosque to pray. Recognized Christian holy days include Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, and Easter. Muslim holy days recognized are Eid al-Adha (Arefa), the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, and Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan). The Government also agreed to a request from Muslim students at Addis Ababa Commercial College to delay the start of afternoon classes until 1:30 p.m. to permit them to perform afternoon prayers at a nearby mosque.

The Government has taken steps to promote interfaith understanding by including religious leaders in major societal campaigns. In launching the National Partnership Forum against HIV/AIDS, all principal religious leaders were present in the forum organization, and at the 2004 National rollout of anti-retroviral treatment leaders from across the religious spectrum were present. No interreligious exchanges were conducted during the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government bans the formation of political parties based on religion. There are no religious political parties in the country, and the ban has never been tested in practice.

The Government does not issue work visas to foreign religious workers unless they are attached to the development wing of a religious organization licensed by the Government. However, this policy is not consistently enforced for Muslims or Orthodox Christians. The Government requires religious organizations to separate their development activities from their religious ones and imposes different licensing processes for each. The Government issued licenses for religious organizations' development activities in the period covered by this report but not for their religious activities. Licenses are required for all religious groups, domestic and foreign. The Ministry of Justice denied a license to at least one traditional Oromo religious organization, called Wakafeta, for unspecified reasons, presumably because the Government suspects the group of collaborating with the outlawed Oromo Liberation Front. The EIASC oversees the activities of foreign imams and screens out perceived Wahhabi influence.

Under the Press Law, it is a crime to incite one religion against another. The press law also allows defamation claims involving religious leaders to be prosecuted as criminal cases. In 2001, the Government filed defamation charges against two journalists after they wrote articles critical of the EOC. Their cases were pending at the end of the period covered by this report. The EHRCO reported that no journalists had been detained or charged during the reporting period with inciting religious groups or with defamation of religious leaders.

Evangelical leaders have complained that, in general, regulations on the importation of Bibles are too strict and that customs duties on Bibles and other religious articles are excessive; however, Bibles and religious articles are subject to the same customs duties as all imported books, donated or otherwise. Continuing discussions between the Government and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus yielded progress on this issue and during the reporting period Parliament passed a proclamation lifting taxation on imported books and printed materials, effectively addressing this issue.

While some Muslim leaders complained in the past that public school authorities sometimes interfered with their free practice of Islam because they prohibited the wearing of headscarves in schools, they reported that the Ministry of Education (MOE) has accepted the practice of wearing headscarves in schools not only in Addis Ababa but in regional areas as well. In the Southern Nations, Gondar, and Dire Dawa, there have been scattered problems concerning headscarves in schools but the local Islamic Council has addressed them. An understanding was reached between the MOE and the EIASC that female Muslim students could use headscarves but not the hijab. The EIASC does not support the wearing of hijabs, which it claims is a tradition from the Middle East, but not one required by the Qur'an. The EIASC reportedly maintains a non-restrictive policy of adherence to traditional Islamic dress codes, and it noted an incident in Gondar during the reporting period

in which a Muslim nursing student refused to remove her hijab while attending to patients. Local religious leaders were called, and the dispute was resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

Minority religious groups have complained of discrimination in the allocation of government land for religious sites. Protestant groups occasionally complain that local officials discriminate against them when the groups seek land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders have complained that because they are perceived as “newcomers,” they remain at a disadvantage in the allocation of land compared with the EOC and the EIASC.

The EIASC has complained that it has more difficulty than the EOC obtaining land from the Government; others believe that the EIASC is favored for mosque locations. Local authorities in the northern town of Axum, a holy city for the EOC, continued to deny Muslim leaders’ repeated requests to allocate land for the construction of a mosque, even though the Constitution provides for freedom to establish institutions of religious education and administration. Tigray regional government officials choose not to interpret this provision liberally in the town of Axum, and the Federal Government has not overruled the regional officials’ interpretation. Muslims have had access to land since the country became a republic in 1995. In 2003, a group of Muslims attempted to build a mosque in Axum, but it was torn down by a local mob because it was built without permission from the regional government. Local officials ordered the Muslim community not to resume construction.

The EIASC also raised concerns about the equitable celebration of religious holidays in the country, noting Orthodox Christian holy days such as Meskel and Epiphany are celebrated in Meskel Square and Jan Meda, two large gathering points in Addis Ababa. The EIASC complained that the celebration of Eid al-Fitr had been relegated to the Addis Ababa stadium, which they do not consider a prominent site. EIASC has asked the City Council of Addis Ababa for land to build a venue for this celebration. The request was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses have stated in the past that they have leased their own plots of land in the capital, due to lack of suitable properties available from the Government. They have also purchased buildings to use as places of worship throughout Addis Ababa. In a few places in Oromiya plots have been provided free of charge to religious groups to build places of worship.

In 2003, the Meserte Kristos/Mennonite Church reported that it was deprived of its property without due process or compensation. The Derg regime had seized their church and church school many years ago. Although the church was able to reclaim its place of worship after the Derg fell from power, the adjacent Sunday school building was converted to a government school. After the church received a letter in 2003 stating it had to vacate the premises of its place of worship as well, the Government seized the building to use as part of the government school on the same compound. The government defends its action under existing legal mechanisms for seizing property.

The Government has not returned other properties to the Mekane Yesus Church that had been seized under the Derg regime, including three student hostels and two schools. The Mekane Yesus leadership stated that these issues were still pending. The church has attempted to repossess the Sidist Kilo hostel building for 17 years with no resolution. Only the headquarters building has been returned to the church, and ownership of the remaining property is yet unresolved. Providing adequate space for churches within Addis Ababa continued to be a major issue among Protestant groups. They noted that the Orthodox Church has built at least 20 churches between September 2003 and July 2005, but no other groups have been able to construct new edifices.

The Government also has not returned the Seventh-day Adventist properties taken by the Derg regime, including two hospitals. The Supreme Islamic Council continued to try to obtain properties outside of the capital that were similarly confiscated. In Addis Ababa and Oromia, structures have been returned under federal provisions; however, edifices under regional statutes have yet to be returned. There is a precedent and a perception that the Government favors the EOC, yet government officials state that there is no discrimination.

A 2002 declaration by the Oromia Regional State Parliament called for the return of all nationalized property originally belonging to religious organizations; however, no property was returned by the end of the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Two men charged with the 2002 murder of Full Gospel Church leader Pastor Demtew remain in prison while their trials continue. The pastor was killed when a mob of EOC priests and other adherents forcibly entered his home at night.

In another instance, while apparently not religiously motivated, the killing of a Muslim man by a Protestant, who authorities have prosecuted for the murder, has been reported as “martyrdom” on a few websites.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some minor conflicts between religious groups continued. These occurred most noticeably between Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and evangelical Protestants, and between Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Muslims. In addition, there continued to be pockets of interreligious tension and criticism between some other religious groups.

According to EHRCO, while the Government allows for freedom of religion, the EOC has tried, under the Patriarch, to consolidate its power and strengthen its influence. For example, members of newer faiths, such as Pentecostals, have encountered overt opposition from the public while proselytizing that has required police intervention to protect them. Muslims and Orthodox Christians report proselytization by Pentecostals and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Ethiopian Orthodox leaders report that sometimes Protestants fail to respect Orthodox holy days and customs. Muslims report that some Pentecostal preachers disparage Islam in their services. There were complaints by some Muslim and Protestant leaders that the EOC’s desire to show its dominance sometimes caused irritation in the religious community.

In most regions, Orthodox Christians and Muslims generally respect each other’s religious observances, and there was tolerance for intermarriage and conversion in certain areas, most notably in Welo, in the Amhara region, as well as in urban areas. The challenge of Wahhabism and its lack of tolerance for others have disturbed the more traditional Ethiopian Muslims of the present EIASC. Members of the EIASC state that Wahhabists believe in supremacy and do not tolerate interaction between Muslims and Christians. The majority of Muslims continued to enjoy good relationships with their neighbors, attending cross cultural and religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. The local Wahhabists shun this type of social mixing.

During the reporting period, the EIASC expressed concern over increasing external Wahhabi influence within the Muslim community. The EIASC noted that money was flowing into the country allegedly through Saudi funded travel agencies, and that its concern over external non-Ethiopian Islamic influences was growing.

In Addis Ababa, the capital, persons of different faiths often live side-by-side. Most urban areas reflect a mixture of all religious faiths. The Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Protestant denominations, particularly the Mekane Yesus Church and Kale Hiwot Churches, provided social services such as health care and education to nonmembers as well as to members.

Leaders of the EIASC struggled with Wahhabist fundamentalism within their ranks. In January 2004, the Council voted to remove all executive members, and staunch anti-Wahhabists were elected to fill the top leadership positions. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative attended the election sessions to demonstrate the Government’s interest in the issue. Additionally, the EIASC expressed concern over the prospect of Wahhabists gaining seats on the Council.

No action has been taken by police officials or the local administration regarding the 2003 beating of church worshippers in Kotebe.

No action has been taken against those responsible for the 2002 beating of evangelical believers in Gurage zone.

In May, religious institutions deployed 1,554 of their members throughout the country to observe the national election. The EIASC deployed 558 observers, Protestant denominations deployed 607, the EOC deployed 359, and the Catholic Church deployed 30. On June 9, 2005, leaders of religious organizations including the EOC, EIASC, Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus, and the Catholic Church made a call for peace following the bloody demonstration the previous day in Addis Ababa. They called upon everyone involved to be patient and present their demands in a peaceful manner.

In November 2003, in the Buta Jira area (Silte Zone) a Protestant family buried a child in a local cemetery. Muslims reportedly dug up the body at night and dumped it in town. The family reported the incident to the local police and zonal administration, but reportedly authorities took little action to resolve the case. Evangelicals claim that they are not able to bury their dead in cemeteries given to them by the Government because Muslims and Orthodox prevent it. In Harar, Evangelicals also were not able to bury their dead in the same cemeteries used by Orthodox and Muslims. Local and regional governments assign burial plots to various faiths. However, isolated incidents occur and in such instances, local government officials generally address the problem.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Embassy has encouraged the Government to ensure that no religious groups are channeling funds through the country to finance terrorist goals. Embassy officials also made an active effort to visit all of the religious groups and faith-based NGOs during the period covered by this report. The Embassy paid close attention to attempts by Wahhabist elements to exert their influence over the EIASC and discussed the matter with government officials.

The U.S. Ambassador continued to hold regular meetings with religious leaders around the country. The Embassy hosted an Eid al-Fitr dinner for Muslim leaders in November 2004, and a dinner for Muslim leaders in the month of Ramadan.

GABON

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 103,347 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.5 million. Major religions practiced in the country include Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism), Islam, and traditional indigenous religions. Government statistics from 1993 indicate that approximately 60 percent of the country's citizens practice Christianity, almost 40 percent practice traditional indigenous religions, and 1 percent practice Islam. However, noncitizens, principally immigrants from Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, and Cameroon, constitute more than 20 percent of the population. As a result, Muslims make up a much larger proportion of the total population than previously reported, but no current statistics are available. The country's President is a member of the Muslim minority. Many persons practice both elements of Christianity and elements of traditional indigenous religions. It is estimated that approximately 73 percent of the total population, including noncitizens, practice at least some elements of Christianity; approximately 12 percent practice Islam (of which 80 to 90 percent are foreigners); approximately 10 percent practice traditional indigenous religions exclusively; and approximately 5 percent practice no religion or are atheists.

Foreign Christian missionaries are present and 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. A 1970 decree banning Jehovah's Witnesses remained in effect; however, the Government did not enforce the ban.

The Ministry of the Interior maintains an official registry of some religious groups; however, it does not register small, indigenous religious groups. The Government does not require religious groups to register but recommends that they do so

to receive full constitutional protection. No financial or tax benefit is conferred by registration; but religious groups are not taxed, can import duty-free items, and are exempted from land use and construction permit fees.

Islamic, Catholic, and Protestant denominations operate primary and secondary schools in the country. These schools are required to register with the Ministry of Education, which is charged with ensuring that these religious schools meet the same standards required for public schools. The Government does not contribute funds to private schools, whether religious or secular.

Both Catholic and Protestant radio stations broadcast in the country.

The Government promotes interfaith relations by facilitating meetings of leaders of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy and the Islamic Council. Such meetings are held periodically, and informal discussions among religious leaders are routine.

The Government celebrates Christian and Muslim holidays as national holidays; these include Easter Sunday and Monday, Ascension Day, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, Christmas, Eid al-Kebir, and Eid al-Fitr.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government has refused to register approximately 10 religious groups, 9 of which were small, indigenous groups. A government decision on the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses has been pending for several years without resolution. In practice, the Government allows Jehovah's Witnesses to assemble and practice their religion. In addition, the Government has permitted Jehovah's Witnesses to proselytize.

The government television stations accorded free transmission time to the Catholic Church, some Protestant congregations, and Islamic mosques. Some Protestant denominations alleged that the government television station does not accord free airtime to minority religious groups. Protestants have at times also alleged that the armed forces favor Roman Catholics and Muslims in hiring and promotion. Some Protestant pastors complain that local officials discriminated against them by making it difficult to obtain building permits to construct churches, charging visa fees on volunteer medical and religious workers not imposed on other denominations, and demanding customs fees for aid materials.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by the report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There were no reports of interreligious violence or intrareligious incidents during the period covered by this report.

Practitioners of some traditional indigenous religions inflicted bodily harm on other persons in 2005. Two adolescent boys found murdered in February are widely believed to have been the victims of ritual killings. No information has been made public on the investigation, if any, into the circumstances of the crime or possible suspects. The Ministry of the Interior has stated in the past that violence and bodily harm to others in the practice of a traditional religion is a criminal offense and is prosecuted vigorously; however, no information about such prosecutions or their results was available.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials meet regularly with leaders of the Catholic Church, the Islamic Superior Council, and Protestant churches. Contacts are maintained with the Ministry of Interior and the Minister of Human Rights to discuss the general state of religion in the country. The Embassy also maintains close contacts with various Christian missionary groups in the country.

THE GAMBIA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 4,361 square miles, and its population is approximately 1,365,000. Sunni Muslims constitute more than 95 percent of the population. The vast majority are Maliki Sufis, of which the main orders represented are Tijaniyah, Qadiriya, Muridiyah, and Ahmadiyah. Except for the Ahmadiyah, all Sufi orders pray together at common mosques. A small percentage of Muslims, predominantly immigrants from South Asia, do not ascribe to any traditional Islamic school of thought.

An estimated 4 percent of the population practices Christianity and less than 1 percent practices indigenous animist religions. The Christian community, situated mostly in the west and south of the country, is predominantly Roman Catholic; there are also several Protestant denominations including Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and various small Protestant evangelical denominations. There is a small group of followers of the Baha'i Faith and no significant Jewish population.

Intermarriage between Muslims and Christians is common. In some areas, Islam and Christianity have been syncretized with animism. There are few atheists in the country.

Foreign missionary groups, representing mostly small denominations from Nigeria and Sierra Leone, operate 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. There is no state religion.

The Constitution establishes Cadi Courts in such places as the Chief Justice determines. The two Cadi Courts in the country sit in Banjul and Kanifing. Their jurisdiction applies only to matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance that involve Muslims. The Cadi Courts apply classical Maliki fiqh (Islamic law).

The Government considers the following religious holidays as national holidays: Tobaski (Eid al-Adha), Yaumul Ashora, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, Koriteh (Eid al-Fitr), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, and Christmas Day. Religious holidays do not affect negatively any religious group.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. Religiously based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are subject to the same registration and licensing requirements as other NGOs.

The Government permits and does not limit religious instruction in schools. Biblical and Qur'anic studies are provided in both public and private schools throughout the country without government restriction or interference. Religious instruction in public schools is provided at government expense but is not mandatory.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In several interviews, Catholic and Anglican bishops have praised the Government and people of the country for the friendly protection and accommodation of the Christian minority. The Gambian Christian Council, an organization consisting of clerical leaders of the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist churches, discusses matters of importance to Christians in the country.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Inter-marriage between members of different religious groups is legal and socially acceptable.

The Inter-Faith Group for Dialogue and Peace (IGDP), comprising representatives of the Christian, Muslim, and Baha'i communities, meets regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern.

Practitioners of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the country firmly believe that Islam mandates the practice and its surrounding rites. In May, the head of the Supreme Islamic Council stated that the practice is an "honor for women to undergo," but other, well-respected local Muslim leaders continued to speak out against it, as did human rights activists and others. Although government programs to promote girls' education and development quietly work to reduce the prevalence of FGM by changing societal attitudes, the Government's official stance is that female circumcision is a cultural issue that the Government cannot forbid. However, on June 22 the National Assembly passed the Children's Bill, aimed at curbing violence against children, that outlaws "social and cultural practices that affect the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular, those customs and practices that are (1) prejudicial to the health and life of the child and; (2) discriminatory to the child on the grounds of sex or other status."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In particular, the U.S. Embassy promoted interfaith dialogue by sending religious leaders to the United States on International Visitor Programs. One participant, a Shari'a judge, took part in a tour that focused on religious diversity in the U.S.

In May 2005, the Embassy and the IGDP jointly sponsored a panel discussion based on a paper written and presented by an Embassy representative entitled, "Judaism and the Dignity of the Human Person in the Process of Inter-Faith Dialogue." Clerics from the Muslim, Christian, and Baha'i faiths participated in the discussion, which was later broadcast twice on national television.

In November 2004, the U.S. Ambassador hosted an Iftar for more than 50 Muslim leaders and some church clerics. The Ambassador hosted a similar event for the country's political leadership.

GHANA

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; however, tensions sometimes occurred between different branches of the same faith, as well as between Christian and traditional faiths. A number of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) promoted interfaith and intrafaith understanding.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 238,538 square miles, and its population is approximately 21 million. According to the 2000 government census, approximately 69 percent of the population is Christian, 15.6 percent is Muslim, and

15.4 percent adheres to traditional indigenous religions or other faiths. The Muslim community has protested these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is closer to 30 percent. Other religions include the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Ninchiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera, Sat Sang, Eckankar, the Divine Light Mission, Hare Krishna, Rastafarianism, and other faiths, as well as some separatist or spiritual churches that include elements of Christianity and traditional beliefs such as magic and divination. Zetahil, a practice unique to the country, combines elements of Christianity and Islam. There are no statistics available for the percentage of atheists.

Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Evangelical Presbyterian, Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zionist, Christian Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, F'eden, numerous charismatic faiths, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventist, Pentecostal, Baptist, and the Society of Friends (Quakers). Christianity often includes an overlay of traditional beliefs.

Traditional indigenous religions include a belief in a Supreme Being, referred to by the Akan ethnic group as Nyame or by the Ewe ethnic group as Mawu, and lesser gods who act as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and human beings. Veneration of ancestors also is characteristic of traditional indigenous religions, because ancestors also provide a link between the Supreme Being and the living and at times may be reincarnated. Religious leaders of these traditional groups are commonly referred to as priests and are trained in the arts of healing and divination. The priests typically operate shrines to the Supreme Deity or to one of the lesser gods, and they rely upon the donations of the public to maintain the shrines and for their own maintenance. Afrikania, also known as the Afrikan Renaissance Mission, actively supports traditional religious practices. Afrikania often criticizes the Government, foreign diplomatic missions, and NGOs, contending that they corrupt traditional values and impose foreign religious beliefs. Afrikania leaders claim the movement has more than 4 million followers; however, no independent confirmation of the claim was available.

Three dominant Islamic traditions are represented in the country: Tijanis, the Wahhabi-oriented Ahlussuna, and the Ahmadis. A small number of Shi'a also are present. The majority of the Muslim population is concentrated in the urban centers of Accra, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Tamale, and Wa, and in northern areas. The majority of the followers of traditional indigenous religions reside mainly in the rural areas of the country. Christians live throughout the country.

Foreign missionaries operate freely, including Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, Muslim, and Mormon groups.

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.

Religious institutions that wish to have formal government recognition are required to register with the Registrar General's Department. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General is the same for any NGO. The organization pays approximately \$0.56 (5,000 cedis) for the application form, approximately \$4 (35,000 cedis) for the registration form, and approximately \$69 (610,000 cedis) for the registration. Applicants are required to renew their registration annually for approximately \$17 (150,000 cedis). Registration is only a formality, and there were no reports that the Government denied registration to any group. Most traditional religions, with the exception of the Afrikania Mission, do not register. Formally registered religions are exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income from trade or business; however, religious organizations are required to pay taxes on business activities that generate income.

Government employees, including the President, are required to swear an oath upon taking office; however, this oath can be either religious or secular, depending on the preference of the individual.

The Government often takes steps to promote interfaith understanding. At government meetings and receptions, there generally is a multid denominational invocation usually led by religious leaders from various faiths. The Government recognizes Christian, Muslim, and secular holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Ministry of Education regulations state that public school authorities should not force students of minority faiths to worship with the majority religious groups in school. The Minister of Education also directed schools to respect the religious rights of all students. During the period covered by this report, Muslim organizations reported that while the directive was not respected in a few isolated cases, Muslim students generally experienced greater religious freedom in public schools than in past years. In a few cases reported by the Director of the Islamic Education Unit in the Greater Accra Region, some school authorities went beyond what is required to ensure the freedom of Muslim students to practice their religious beliefs by providing, for instance, areas for Muslim worship.

Many public schools and universities maintain Christian affiliations and practices that marginalize Muslim students as minorities. Christian missionaries founded the oldest and most prestigious public schools. These schools still derive financial support from their religious affiliation. They often require all Christian students to attend worship services and offer moral teachings based on Christian beliefs.

Students attending government-administered boarding schools are required to attend a nondenominational service on Sundays. Muslim students in these boarding schools are exempted from the service and are permitted to practice daily prayers. Nonetheless, some Muslim students complain of insensitivity by some public school administrators who schedule examinations on Fridays, a day Muslims are expected to devote to their faith. Similarly, Muslim leaders and parents have expressed concerns about the difficulties Muslim students encounter during the Ramadan fast. Most school authorities reportedly fail to make special meal arrangements for fasting Muslim students, who prefer not to join their colleagues during normal meal hours. Some Muslim parents are concerned that their children must endure school environments that magnify religious differences to obtain the best public education available.

Muslim students at the University of Ghana continued to use temporary spaces in residence halls for prayers in addition to the central mosque.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable and spokesmen for these communities often advocate tolerance toward different religions; however, there was tension among some religious groups. Public debate continued over religious worship versus traditional practices and respect for the rights and customs of others in a diverse society. Because Christianity over the years has come to pervade many aspects of society, some Muslims feel a sense of political and social exclusion, due to factors such as the token representation of Muslims in national leadership positions, public prayers that often are Christian only, and the ubiquity of Christian slogans.

There were occasional reports of interreligious and intrareligious disputes but no violent incidents based on religious affiliation. Tensions continued between members of the Tijanniya and Ahlussuna groups throughout the country. Muslim organizations worked to decrease intra-Muslim tensions through education and conflict resolution exercises.

In December 2004, the Volta Regional Security Council (REGSEC) banned the 2004 annual convention of the Apostles Revelation Society at its international headquarters at New-Tadzewu in the Ketu District. REGSEC took this step to deter a possible outbreak of violence between factions within the group. After the natural death of its founder, the group was beset by a series of conflicts between factions, leading to court suits, threats, and skirmishes.

Trokosi, also known as Fiashidi, is a religious practice involving a period of servitude lasting up to 3 years. It is found primarily among the ethnic Ewe group in the Volta Region. To atone for an allegedly heinous crime committed by a family member, another family member is sent to be trained in traditional religion at a fetish shrine for a period lasting between several weeks and 3 years. In many cases,

a virgin girl, sometimes under the age of 10 but often in her teens, is offered as a means of atonement. In exceptional cases, when no girl is available, boys or adults may serve. The Trokosis or Fiashidis, as these persons are called, become the property of the shrine god and the charge of the shrine priest for the duration of their stay. As a charge of the priest, the Trokosi serves in the shrine and undergoes instruction in the traditional indigenous religion. The Trokosi helps with the upkeep of the shrine, such as sweeping and pouring libations. A Trokosi may or may not attend school. Shrine priests generally are male but may be female as well. The practice explicitly forbids a Trokosi or Fiashidi to engage in sexual activity or contact during the atonement period. In the past, there were reports that the priests subjected girls to sexual abuse; however, while individual instances of abuse may occur and many priests have eventually taken Trokosis as their wives, there is no evidence that sexual or physical abuse is a systematic part of the practice.

During the atonement period, most Trokosis do not live in the shrines, which generally are little more than fenced-in huts with small courtyards; many remain with their families or stay with members of the shrine who live nearby. When a minor girl serves as a Trokosi or Fiashidi, her family must provide for the girl's needs, including food and clothing; however, in some cases, families are unable to do so. After a Trokosi has completed her service to the shrine, her family completes its obligation by providing items that may include drinks, cloth, money, and sometimes livestock to the shrine for a final release ritual. After the release ritual, the girl returns to her family and resumes her life, without, in the vast majority of cases, any stigma attaching to her status as a former Trokosi shrine participant. In very infrequent cases, the family abandons the girl or cannot afford the cost of the final rites, in which case she may remain indefinitely at the shrine. Alternatively, an abandoned or poor Trokosi may leave the shrine and return to her village, with her family's association then sundered with the shrine. In general, former Trokosi girls continue to associate themselves with the shrine into adulthood, making voluntary visits for ceremonies.

Reports on the number of women and girls bound to various Trokosi shrines vary; however, a shrine rarely has more than four Trokosis serving their atonements at any one time. According to credible reports from international observers and local leaders, there were not more than 50 girls serving at Trokosi shrines throughout the Volta Region. Reports by local leaders, district authorities, shrine priests, elders, and human rights activists indicated that the incidence of Trokosi was declining considerably.

According to human rights groups, the practice has decreased in recent years because other belief systems have gained followers, and fetish priests who die have not been replaced. Adherents of Trokosi describe it as a practice based on traditional African religious beliefs; however, the Government does not recognize it as a religion.

Belief in witchcraft remains strong in many areas. Rural women may be banished by traditional village authorities or their families for suspected witchcraft. Most accused witches are older women, often widows, who are identified by fellow villagers as the cause of difficulties, such as illness, crop failure, or financial misfortune. Many of these banished women go to live in "witchcamps," villages in the north populated by suspected witches. The women do not face formal legal sanction if they return home; however, most fear that they may be beaten or killed if they return to their villages.

The law provides protection for alleged witches, and the Government continued to prosecute persons who committed acts of violence against suspected witches. The government-funded Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) estimates that approximately 1,090 women suspected of being witches permanently reside in camps in Yendi, Bimbilla, and Gambaga. CHRAJ and human rights NGOs mounted a campaign to end the practice of banishing these women from their villages but have met with little success. In December 2004, CHRAJ renewed its pledge to work with other stakeholders to reintegrate the alleged witches into their communities. Various organizations provide food, medical care, and other forms of support to the residents of the camps.

Human rights activists have raised concerns about prayer camps in which individuals believed to be possessed by evil spirits are chained for weeks, physically assaulted, and denied food and water. In 2003, Youth Alert Network found that 80 percent of the 50 Volta Region prayer camps it surveyed engaged in such practices. Among the victims are family members who are blamed for misfortunes and the mentally ill, some reportedly as young as 6 years old. Families send these victims to be exorcised of evil spirits. The victims are held at the camps until they are deemed to be healed. Media reports indicate that these abusive practices extend to the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, Western, Ashanti, and Brong Ahafo regions.

CHRAJ, the Department of Social Welfare, and the National Commission for Civic Education agreed to investigate, but were hindered by a lack of resources and staff. At the end of the period covered by this report, no investigations had been initiated.

There were several cases of parents who denied minors medical treatment and polio immunization because medical assistance is incompatible with their religious beliefs. In April 2005, health personnel and volunteers were unable to vaccinate children of the Jesus Christ Apostolic Faith Church at Agona Asafo against polio. Members of the church have persistently refused to allow their children to be immunized. During the same month, government authorities took a 14-year-old girl from parents who belonged to this denomination when they would not allow their daughter to have an operation to remove a potentially fatal tumor.

Clergy and other religious leaders actively discourage religiously motivated violence, discrimination, or harassment.

There were occasional and isolated anti-Semitic sentiments expressed in two weekly newspapers.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In view of the particular social and economic challenges faced by Muslim communities in the country, Muslim outreach has been a focal point of U.S. Embassy activities since 2002. In the period covered by this report, the Embassy sponsored the travel of several Muslims to the United States through the International Visitors Program. In late 2004, the Embassy hosted several Iftar programs, including one by the Ambassador. The Embassy also supported the Islamic Foundation for Peace and Development's workshop series on child rights, child education, forced child marriages, and child development.

Throughout 2004, Embassy officers hosted several events with Muslim leaders in the Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, and Tamale regions to raise awareness of potential long-term programming and short-term project opportunities to benefit Muslim communities. To increase understanding of American values and religious freedom in the U.S., the Embassy hosted an American imam who addressed students at the two largest universities and appeared on three television shows. In Tamale, Embassy representatives visited Muslim students at a tertiary institution and later hosted an open forum on U.S. policy for a predominantly Muslim audience.

In April 2005, the Embassy hosted a human rights roundtable of NGO representatives, journalists, and public officials that covered a variety of religious freedom issues and included a focused discussion of the 2004 International Religious Freedom report on the country. Embassy officers also meet regularly with government and NGO contacts to monitor issues related to religious freedom that have been problematic in the past, such as the Trokosi tradition in the Volta region and incidents of interreligious and intrareligious conflict. Also in April 2005, Embassy officials traveled to the Volta Region to research the Trokosi situation and discuss the practice with local contacts.

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. However, the Government reportedly favors Muslims over non-Muslims.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, in some areas, strong social pressure discourages non-Muslims from openly practicing their religion, and the Government tends to defer to local Muslim sensibilities.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 94,926 square miles, and its population is an estimated 9.2 million. Islam is demographically, socially, and culturally the dominant religion. According to credible estimates, approximately 85 percent of the population

adheres to Islam, 10 percent follows various Christian faiths, and 5 percent holds traditional indigenous beliefs. Muslims generally adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam; there are relatively few adherents of the Shi'a branch, although they are increasing in number. Among the Christian groups, there are Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and other Christian evangelical groups active in the country and recognized by the Government. There is a small Baha'i community. There are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religions among the expatriate community. Few citizens, if any, profess atheism.

Although there are no known organized heterogeneous or syncretistic religious communities, followers of Islam and Christianity have incorporated syncretistic tendencies into the practice of both, reflecting the continuing influence and acceptability of traditional indigenous beliefs and rituals.

Demographically, Muslims are a majority in all four major regions of the country. Christians are most numerous in Conakry, in the southern part of the country, and in the eastern forest region. Christians are also found in all large towns except those in the Fouta Djallon region in the middle of the country, where the deep cultural entrenchment of Islam in Pular (or Fulani or Peuli) society makes it difficult to establish other religious communities. Traditional indigenous religions are most prevalent in the forest region.

No data is available regarding active participation in formal religious services or rituals; however, the Ministry of the National Islamic League estimates that 70 percent of Muslims practice their faith regularly.

The country's large immigrant and refugee populations generally practice the same faiths as citizens, although those from neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone have higher percentages of Christians and adherents of traditional indigenous religions.

Foreign missionary groups are active in the country and include Roman Catholic, Philafricaine, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, and many American missionary societies.

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; however, some believe the Government favors Muslims over non-Muslims through its support of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

Both Muslim and Christian holy days are recognized by the Government and celebrated by the population. Religious holy days celebrated as national holidays include Easter, Assumption Day, Christmas, Tabaski, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, and Ramadan.

The government-controlled official press, which includes the daily *Horoya* and the Guinean Radio and TV network, reports on religious events involving Islamic and Christian groups.

All religious groups newly operating in the country are required to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Registration entitles religious organizations to value-added tax (VAT) exemptions on incoming shipments and some energy subsidies. Unregistered religious groups continued to operate in the country; however, they are not entitled to VAT exemptions and other benefits available to registered groups. Also, unregistered religious groups are subject to government expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal.

The small Baha'i community practices its faith openly and freely, although it is not officially recognized. It is unknown whether the community has asked for official recognition.

Like other religious groups seeking government recognition, missionary groups are required to apply and declare their aims and activities to the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Most new missionary groups join the Association of Churches and Missions in Guinea (AEMEG) and receive assistance in fulfilling the administrative requirements of the recognition process.

With rare exceptions, foreign missionary groups and church-affiliated relief agencies operate freely in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to require foreign members of missionary and church groups to pay a visa fee. The past policy of waiving visa fees for members of church groups no longer applied.

All private schools are required to register with the Government's Ministry of Pre-University and Civic Education. The Government's Service for Statistics and Planning, which is part of the Ministry of Pre-University and Civic Education, officially monitors all secular and religious private schools to ensure they follow the standard national curriculum. Due to the high demand for education and the inadequate supply of teachers and schools in urban areas, the number of unregistered private schools grew. Because of limited government resources, unregistered schools were not closed but rather were ignored by government authorities. However, students at unregistered schools graduated without any recognized credentials or certificates. While there were some government-financed "Franco-Arab" schools, all of which included religious instruction in their curriculum, the vast majority of students attended secular public schools.

There is a general tradition of Qur'anic schools throughout the country. Qur'anic schools are particularly strong in the Fouta Djallon region, which was ruled as an Islamic theocracy during the 18th century.

There are a few scattered madrassahs, schools usually associated with a mosque, in the northern part of the country and in the forest region. Private radical Islamic groups sponsored such schools with foreign funds. The madrassahs were not linked with the public school system and were not recognized by the Government. As with other private schools, madrassahs may be closed arbitrarily, since they do not have the Government's official recognition.

Missionaries also operate their own schools with no interference from the Government. Catholic and Protestant schools are located primarily in Conakry, but there are some throughout the rest of country as well. Christian missionary schools teach the national curriculum (which is not influenced by religion) and include a special education component for Christians.

The Government did not have a specific program to promote interfaith understanding; however, the Government met with the Inter-Religious Council, which is composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The Government also invited all religious groups to participate in its civic education efforts and included different religious groups in its national prayers for peace.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of the National Islamic League represents the country's Sunni Muslim majority. The Ministry's stated policy is to promote better relations with other religious denominations and dialogue aimed at ameliorating interethnic and inter-religious tensions. The Government has spoken out against the proliferation of Shi'a fundamentalist groups on the grounds that they "generate confusion and deviation" within the country's Islamic family. At the end of the period covered by this report, the foreign-funded Shi'a Islamic school to which the Government denied permission to open in 2004 remained closed; otherwise, the religious activities of Shi'a groups were not restricted.

Government support of Islam through the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has led some non-Muslims to claim the Government uses its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. Although the Government sometimes provides assistance such as vehicles and lodging for events involving other faith groups, some are dissatisfied that no official governmental entity exists for non-Muslim religions. Non-Muslims are represented in the Cabinet, administrative bureaucracy, and armed forces; however, the Government refrains from appointing non-Muslims to important administrative positions in certain parts of the country, in deference to the strong social dominance of Islam in these regions.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the various religions generally are amicable; however, in some parts of the country, Islam's dominance was such that there was strong social pressure that discouraged non-Muslims from openly practicing their religion. There were

reports that this pressure sometimes limited or retarded efforts to acquire land for religious use by other faiths.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains contact with clergy and religious leaders from all major religious communities and monitors developments affecting religious freedom.

The Embassy sponsored lectures and seminars that provided information on the religious diversity found in American society. The Embassy also distributed copies of the U.S. Government-sponsored Arabic language magazine *Hi* to imams and mosques in Conakry and expanded distribution to the city of Kankan in Upper Guinea. The Embassy regularly includes members of the Islamic League in public outreach programming because mosques play an important role in disseminating information in local communities. The Embassy selected the Director of the Islamic Center in Kankan for a 3-week international visitor trip on leadership in the Muslim community. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials met with the Minister of the National Islamic League, the senior imam of Conakry, and religious leaders outside the capital.

GUINEA-BISSAU

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

There was little 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. However, in March 2005, the Government prohibited Ahmadiya activity in the country.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, a dispute between local Muslims and the Ahmadiya group in the city of Gabu resulted in injuries to four Ahmadiya members.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 13,948 square miles, and its population is approximately 1,388,000. An estimated 38 to 45 percent of the population is Muslim; and between 5 and 13 percent is Christian. The remainder of the population follows traditional indigenous or animist religious practices. There are few atheists.

Christians belong to a number of groups, including the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations. Christians are concentrated in Bissau and other large towns. Islam is practiced most widely by the Fula and Mandinka ethnic groups, and Muslims generally live in the north and northeast. Practitioners of traditional religions inhabit the remainder of the country. Virtually all Muslims are Sunni. The Ahmadiya are not confined to any particular geographic region. Their numbers are extremely small; there is no reliable data on number of adherents. With the 2005 banning of Ahmadiya activities, followers have mostly returned to practicing the same form of Sunni Islam that other Muslims in the country practice.

Missionaries from numerous Christian denominations long have been active, and they operate in the country without restriction.

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. Members of all major faiths are represented in the National Assembly.

Christmas is the only holy day considered a national holiday.

The Government requires that religious groups be licensed and has reportedly not refused any applications. There were no reports that new applications were made during the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, in March 2005, following a dispute in the previous month between Muslims and members of the Ahmadiya group in the eastern city of Gabu, the Government prohibited Ahmadiya activity, contending that Ahmadiya activities, including the group's practice of paying locals to attend services, were disruptive. In 2003, the Ahmadiya, expelled from the country in 2001, had been permitted to return after the Government determined that former President Yala's decision to banish them had been an illegal breach of due process.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Society is generally tolerant on religious matters; however, a high illiteracy rate leaves many easily susceptible to misinformation and manipulation by local leaders and others.

In February 2005, a dispute between local Muslims and the Ahmadiya group in the city of Gabu resulted in injuries to four Ahmadiya members before police intervened.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Since there is no U.S. Embassy in Bissau, the capital, the U.S. Embassy in Dakar, Senegal, handled all official contact with the country.

The Embassy maintained relations with leaders of major religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and missionary groups in the country, including the National Islamic Council and the Catholic bishops. Since 2003, the Embassy has hosted an annual Iftar dinner in Bissau for Muslim leaders. The Embassy continued to seek opportunities to further understanding of religious freedom in the United States through public diplomacy programs, such as the International Visitors Program and dissemination of publications promoting tolerance.

KENYA

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; however, some Muslim leaders continue to charge that the Government is hostile toward Muslims.

There generally is a great level of tolerance among religious groups although some Muslims perceive themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in a predominantly Christian country. There are some interfaith movements, but the Ufungamano Initiative, which previously grouped Muslims and Christians, now consists only of Christians.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 225,000 square miles, and its population is estimated to be 32 million; approximately 88 percent live in rural areas. According to official government figures, Protestants are the largest religious group, representing approximately 38 percent of the population. Roman Catholics represent 28 percent of the population. Seven percent of the population practices Islam, 1 per-

cent practices Hinduism, and the remainder follows various traditional indigenous religions or offshoots of Christian religions. There are very few atheists. Some sources dispute these figures; Muslim groups often claim to represent 15 to 20 percent of the population, sometimes even more. Other sources also consider the 7 percent figure too low, estimating the Muslim population to fall within the 10 to 15 percent range.

Most religious groups are active throughout the country, but certain groups dominate particular regions. For example, North Eastern Province, where the population is chiefly Somali, is mostly Muslim. Muslims also predominate in Coast Province, except for its western areas, which mostly are Christian. Eastern Province is approximately 50 percent Muslim (primarily in the north) and 50 percent Christian (primarily in the south). The rest of the country largely is Christian, with some persons practicing traditional indigenous religions.

Many foreign missionary groups operate, the largest of which are the African Inland Mission (evangelical Protestant), the Southern Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Assembly of Kenya, and the Church Missionary Society of Britain (Anglican). The Government generally has permitted these missionary groups to assist the poor and to operate schools and hospitals. Missionaries openly promote their religious beliefs and have encountered little resistance.

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. However, Muslim and Christian groups remain engaged in a long-standing debate over whether special Islamic courts should be recognized in the country's Constitution at the end of the period covered by this report. The Government is currently involved in this dispute in its efforts to write a new constitution. Muslim groups have also voiced concerns regarding a proposed anti-terrorism bill and government assistance to Islamic schools.

The Constitution and the Kadhis' Courts Act of 1967 established a venue to have certain types of civil cases adjudicated based on Islamic law. The Constitution provides for the establishment of Kadhis' courts where "all the parties profess the Muslim religion" in suits addressing "questions of Muslim law relating to personal status, marriage, divorce or inheritance." Articles 65 and 67 make it clear that Kadhis' courts are "subordinate" courts, meaning that the secular High Court has jurisdiction to supervise any civil or criminal proceedings before a subordinate court. It also indicates that if a question involving constitutional or legal interpretation arises in a Kadhis' court proceeding, any party involved in the proceedings may refer the question to the High Court.

In March 2004, the National Constitutional Conference, which began its work in 2003, completed a new draft constitution, which provides for freedom of religion and separation of church and state. According to the draft constitution there shall be no state religion, and the state shall treat all religions equally.

The Kadhis' courts issue continues to generate controversy. The draft constitution retains Kadhis' courts as subordinate courts with essentially the same jurisdictions as are included in the current Constitution. However, in June 2005, a coalition of Christian churches unveiled a proposed constitution of its own, which did not include the Kadhis' courts. Later the same month, the Anglican Church of Kenya specifically announced its opposition to Kadhis' courts, arguing that including Kadhis' courts in the constitution would give preferential treatment to Muslims. An Anglican bishop fueled the fire by saying that in countries like Nigeria where Shari'a law is official, there is no peace between Christians and Muslims.

Muslim groups argue that other religious groups could establish their own courts if necessary. They further contend that the recognition of Kadhis' courts was a condition for the integration of the coastal strip at the time of independence and question why opponents now object to this system. By the end of the period covered by this report, the effort to adopt a new constitution remained stalemated, but the controversy over the Kadhis' courts continued to reveal latent animosities between Christians and Muslims.

In 2003, the Government published the Suppression of Terrorism Bill. Many observers, including the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), found the bill objectionable on human rights grounds, arguing that it contains provisions that violate the Constitution. Muslim leaders argue that the bill specifically targets their community. In June 2004, the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, referring to the arrest of 30 Muslims on terrorism charges, accused the Government of tar-

getting Muslims and applying the bill as if it were law. A new bill was being drafted, but Muslims and human rights activists continue to argue that the bill was not necessary and would inevitably discriminate against Muslims.

The Government requires new religious organizations to register with the Registrar of Societies, which reports to the Office of the Attorney General. The Government allows traditional indigenous religious organizations to register, although many choose not to do so. Once registered, religious organizations may apply for tax-exempt status, including exemption from paying duty on imported goods. Applications for tax exemptions are approved on a case-by-case basis. Some religious institutions accused the former government of revoking their exempt status on value added tax and custom duties. For example, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) claimed that the former government revoked its exempt status because the Church supported opposition political groups. The current government, however, does not use tax laws to favor one religious group over another.

Religious organizations generally receive equal treatment from the Government; however, some small splinter groups have found it difficult to register when the Government views them as an offshoot of a larger religious organization. Political parties also must register with the Government. The Government has refused to reverse its 1992 denial of registration of the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) on the grounds that the IPK, which in 1992 was involved in a number of violent confrontations with police, violated the “secular principle” of the Constitution.

In areas that are largely Christian, there are morning prayers in public schools. All children participate in the assembly but are not punished if they remain silent during prayers. The Government and some churches frequently disagree over school management when both share responsibility for the school. Often churches provide the land and the buildings for the schools, while the Government provides the teachers. This has led to disputes over school management and occasionally to the closing of schools. In its 2003 report on religious freedom in public schools, the Standing Committee on Human Rights found that the Africa Inland Church (AIC) infringed on students’ freedom of worship. The AIC sponsors a number of schools, some of which are public. The report found that the AIC compelled all students admitted to its schools to adhere to its beliefs, which contradicts the Constitution.

Islamic institutions sponsor a few public schools that the Government supports through payment of teachers’ salaries and the provision of equipment. Some Muslims have expressed concern that the lack of a university in Coast Province, which has a large Muslim population, hinders educational opportunities for Muslims; however, higher education is available to Muslim students in other regions. Some Muslims voiced opposition to a government program, financed in part by the U.S. Government, which works with Islamic schools to improve the quality and efficiency of primary education. They charged that the aim of this program is to dilute the teaching of “true” Islam.

The Ministry of Transport and Communication has approved regional radio and television broadcast licenses for several Muslim and Christian groups. The petition of the Catholic Church for a national frequency was not resolved by the end of the period covered by this report. To date, no media organization except the government-owned Kenya Broadcasting Corporation has been granted a national frequency; however, some organizations—both secular and religious—have been assigned a series of regional broadcasting frequencies to give their broadcasts national reach.

The Government celebrates several holy days as national holidays, including Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, some Muslim leaders charge that the Government is hostile toward Muslims. The leaders claim that, since the 1998 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, the 2002 terrorist attacks in Mombasa, and terrorist attacks elsewhere, government discrimination against their community has worsened, especially demands for identity documents. According to these leaders, authorities more rigorously scrutinize the identification cards of persons with Muslim surnames, especially ethnic Somalis, and sometimes require additional documentation of citizenship, such as birth certificates of parents and even grandparents. The Government says that this heightened scrutiny is an attempt to deter illegal immigration rather than to discriminate against ethnic Somalis or their religious affiliation.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports that private companies fired members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, allegedly for their refusal to work on Saturdays.

Practicing witchcraft is a criminal offense under colonial-era laws; however, persons generally are prosecuted for this offense only in conjunction with some other charge, such as murder. Witchcraft traditionally has been a common explanation for diseases of unknown cause. The practice of witchcraft is understood widely to encompass attempts to harm others not only by magic but also by covert means such as poisons. Although many traditional indigenous religions include or accommodate belief in the efficacy of witchcraft, they generally approve of harmful witchcraft only for defensive or retaliatory purposes and purport to offer protection against it.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

A public opinion poll carried out in late 2004 asked respondents which human rights they thought were abused in the country. Only 7 percent included freedom of worship as a problem, with this right ranking 22nd out of the 26 rights listed. However, in the heavily Muslim Coast Province, 31 percent believed respect for freedom of religion was a problem.

Prominent local Muslims continued to charge the Government with arbitrarily harassing Muslims in the name of the war on terrorism. In May 2004, a Somali-Kenyan Member of Parliament wrote a letter to a leading newspaper citing several cases of what he alleged were arbitrary arrests and deportation of Muslims.

Wanjiru Nduhiu, arrested in 2002 on charges of urging her followers to renounce Christianity and revert to traditional beliefs and practices, including female genital mutilation, remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report. There were no other 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There generally is a great level of tolerance among religious groups, although some Muslims perceive themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in a predominantly Christian country. Inter-marriage between members of Christian denominations is common, and interfaith prayer services occur frequently. Inter-marriage between Muslims and Christians, although less frequent, also is socially acceptable, and mosques and Christian churches can be found on the same city blocks.

For years Muslims and Christians have held an open debate over their respective places in society. Each group claims to have a larger number of adherents than is plausible, and some Muslim groups believe that the Government and business communities deliberately have impeded development in predominantly Muslim areas. Some Muslim leaders claim that discrimination against Muslims has resulted in a greater incidence of poverty among Muslims than among other religious groups; however, there is no statistical evidence to support this claim. At times the debate has undermined mutual trust.

Unlike during the previous reporting period, there were no reports of Muslim youths or demonstrators burning down churches.

There have been no developments in the 2003 killing of Joseph Okech, who died in a fight during Sunday services between two factions of St. Stephen's Church in Dandora.

There were no further developments in incidents from previous years regarding disputes over land ownership and institutional conflicts between rival religious factions.

In April 2004, a mob killed a man in Mt. Elgon whom they accused of practicing witchcraft. Villagers claimed they had found a snake and witchcraft paraphernalia in the man's house and blamed him for the death of 810 persons. A week earlier, a group of Mt. Elgon villagers stormed the homestead of another man they suspected of witchcraft. The man escaped, but the mob set fire to five houses in his homestead. In June 2005, a couple was arrested in Western Kenya under the Witchcraft Act for allegedly possessing charms. Unlike similar cases in past years, no one alleged that these incidents were politically motivated.

There have been reports of intolerance among refugee groups in the country. Somali refugees reportedly have attacked relatives who marry refugees belonging to faiths other than Islam. Somali refugees at the Dadaab camps also reportedly have

verbally and physically attacked Sudanese refugee women who wear westernized clothing considered “too revealing” by Somali standards.

There have been societal efforts to bridge religious divides. The Inter-Faith Peace Movement represents a broad religious spectrum, and its members include the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims, the Muslim Consultative Council (MCC), the Methodist Church, the Catholic Church, the NCKK, the AIC, the PCEA, and the Hindu Council. The NCKK generally is involved in a variety of civil society initiatives, including conflict resolution. The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, the MCC, and the NCKK continued a program to promote interfaith dialogue and reduce ethnic conflict in Isiolo district. There are other cooperative efforts among religious groups to work on societal problems, including the Inter-Religious Steering Committee for Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation.

In 2003, the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM) withdrew from the Ufungamano Initiative, an interfaith movement that helped spur the constitutional review process. SUPKEM left Ufungamano after some Christian members decided to oppose the inclusion of Kadhis’ courts in a new constitution.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy has made a concerted effort to bridge the gaps that exist between Muslims and Christians. Embassy officials maintain regular contact with all religious communities, and the Ambassador hosts meetings with religious leaders to discuss issues affecting their communities. The Ambassador and Embassy officials routinely travel throughout the country to meet with religious and community leaders to facilitate dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Government also provides grants to many communities that, for historical and religious reasons, perceive themselves to have been marginalized by previous governments. The U.S. military carries out civic action programs to provide medical and veterinary assistance as well as to build and repair schools in Muslim and other marginalized communities.

LESOTHO

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,720 square miles, and the Government reports that its population is 2 million.

Christianity is the dominant religion. The Catholic Church estimates that approximately 90 percent of the population is Christian of which 65 percent is Roman Catholic and 25 percent is Lesotho Evangelical, Anglican, and other Christian denominations. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and members of traditional indigenous religions comprise the remaining 10 percent of the population.

While Christians can be found throughout the country, Muslims live mainly in the northeast. Most practitioners of Islam are of Asian origin, while the majority of Christians are the indigenous Basotho. Many Christians still practice their traditional cultural beliefs and rituals along with Christianity. The Catholic Church has fused some aspects of local culture into its services; for example, the singing of hymns during services has developed into a traditional call and response in Sesotho—the indigenous language—as well as English. In addition, priests dress in traditional local attire during services. The pre-Christian indigenous religion, whose priesthood is called Songoma, influences all religious practices.

Missionaries active in the country represent evangelical, traditional Protestant and Roman Catholic churches from North America, Europe, and South Africa; Muslim groups from the subcontinent; and Buddhist groups from East Asia.

The Muslim community has seven small mosques. With the assistance of the Libyan Embassy the community has been trying to build a larger mosque, training center and madrassah; however, the community claims it has been hindered by bureaucratic delays.

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 and no evidence that the Government favors any particular religion.

There are four religious holy days that are also national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas.

The Government does not establish requirements for religious group recognition. Generally, the Government does not provide benefits to religious groups. Any religious group may apply for a waiver of taxes on charitable donations from outside the country; however, in practice few, if any, waivers are given. Under the Societies Act, any group may register with the Government, regardless of the purpose of the organization. The only requirements are a constitution and a leadership committee. Unregistered groups are not eligible for any government benefits, such as duty-free import permits for donated items or tax relief on donated funds. There are no penalties for not registering and it is common for informal church groups not to register.

According to Immigration and Labor officials, they scrutinize visas for Nigerian missionaries coming to work in Lesotho due to reports of past questionable business dealings by some Nigerian missionaries.

The strong Catholic presence led to the establishment of Catholic schools in the last century, and to their influence over education policy. However, the influence of the Catholic Church has decreased in recent years, and it now owns less than 40 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education pays and certifies all teachers, and requires a standard curriculum for both secular and parochial schools. Parents are free to send their children to parochial schools of their choice; however, in practice this choice is constrained in many parts of the country by a lack of schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Mutual understanding and cooperation between Christians and Muslims is the norm. There were ecumenical efforts to promote tolerance and cooperation on social issues.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy and local religious leaders discussed their roles in maintaining political peace and assisting with the consolidation of democracy.

LIBERIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some exceptions during the reporting period.

There was some improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) tolerated religious freedom.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Despite interaction among religious groups, some tension remained evident. In Monrovia, religious violence between ethnic Mandingo Muslims and other ethnic groups during 3 days in October 2004 resulted in the destruction of several churches and mosques, other extensive property damage, and approximately 25 deaths. In rural areas, tension between Muslim Mandingos and ethnic Lormas, Kissi, and Gbandi eased considerably, but tension remained high in Nimba County between Gias, Manos, and Mandingos. There was also tension in Bong County between the Mandingos and the Kpelles, who are predominantly Christians and animist.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 43,000 square miles. Its population is estimated at 3.4 million. As much as 40 percent of the population practices either Christianity or Christianity combined with elements of traditional indigenous religions. Approximately 40 percent exclusively practices traditional indigenous religions. Approximately 20 percent of the population practices Islam, which continued to gain adherents. A small percentage is Baha'i or atheist.

Christian denominations include the Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), and AME Zion denominations, as well as a variety of Pentecostal churches. Some of the Pentecostal movements are affiliated with churches outside the country, while others are independent.

The Muslim population is mainly from the Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups, which are found predominantly in the West. Ethnic groups throughout the country participate in the traditional religious practices of the Poro and Sande secret societies. Christians live throughout the country.

A large number of foreign missionary groups work 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 NTGL at all levels strives to protect these rights. The NTGL did not harass, marginalize, or attempt to intimidate the Muslim population.

There is no state religion. Government ceremonies open and close with prayers and may include the singing of hymns. The prayers and hymns are usually Christian, but occasionally are Islamic. There are four Muslim Cabinet Ministers.

Former President Charles Taylor divided the National Muslim Council of Liberia by seeding the Council with his loyalists, and members of the Council remain divided. Sheikh Konneh, the former National Muslim Council leader, formed a separate council and is acting Chairperson of the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia (IRC), a well-known organization formerly led by Archbishop Michael Kpakala Francis. The IRC coordinated peace efforts among the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia rebels, and the ex-government/pro-Taylor forces, and has continued to promote interreligious dialogue and reconciliation.

In January 2005, the NTGL did not sponsor a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, but 33 members of the Muslim Council of Liberia made the pilgrimage, led by Alhaji Ibrakim Fumba Sheriff. A few independent Muslims made the pilgrimage as well.

Major Christian holy days, including Fast and Prayer Day, Easter, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas, are observed as national holidays while Islamic holy days are not. The NTGL mandates that public businesses and markets, including Muslim businesses and shops, remain closed on Sundays and major Christian holy days, an issue that Muslim leaders have brought to the Legislative Assembly. There is no

legal requirement to excuse Muslims from employment or classes for Friday prayers, although some employers do so.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register their articles of incorporation with the Government, along with a statement of the purpose of the organization. Traditional indigenous religious groups are not required to register, and generally do not. Registration is routine, and there were no reports that the registration process was burdensome or discriminatory.

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Religious education, particularly Christian education, is taught in public schools but is not mandatory. Students can opt out of religious instruction, and parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons.

Members of the military service have churches and mosques accessible near their barracks. The military provides chaplains for members of major religious groups as well as minority groups.

The NTGL has not specifically dedicated material resources to anti-bias and religious tolerance education. However, it is supportive of efforts to promote interfaith understanding and has urged the IRC to continue its efforts to encourage interreligious dialogue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Although several Muslims hold senior government positions, including four ministerial posts, many Muslims believe they were bypassed for desirable jobs on account of their religion.

High-level government officials were required to take oaths based on their religious beliefs when assuming their new office.

The Government responded to requests for the restitution of religious properties. In the Taylor era, government militia seized some properties belonging to ethnic Mandingo Muslims. Since 2003, most confiscated properties have been abandoned or returned to their owners. All religious groups had an equal opportunity to reclaim property formerly belonging to their religious organizations, particularly if used to hold religious services.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Since 2003, there have been no arrests based on religion or ethnicity. No state executions based on religion took place in the period covered by the report.

During the reporting period, there were no reports that persons were detained without charge or placed under house arrest based on their religious beliefs or practices.

All religious and political detainees held by Taylor's government were released, and the NTGL did not detain anyone on the basis 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions contributed to religious freedom. The IRC promotes dialogue among various religious communities. In October 2004, a property dispute escalated into widespread violence between Mandingos, who are predominantly Muslim, and other predominantly Christian ethnic groups. The violence broke out in Monrovia and spread to Kakata and other nearby towns and villages. At least 25 persons were killed, and several mosques and churches were looted and burned. The United Nations Peacekeepers (UNMIL) brought the situation under control after 3 days. The violence was widely regarded as a reflection of ethnic rather than religious tensions.

The country's civil war, which ended in 2003, had a religious undertone in that the LURD rebels were mostly Muslim Mandingos while government troops were mostly animists and Christians. Ethnic tensions persist between the Mandingo and several other ethnic groups.

Ritual killings, in which killers remove body parts from their victims for use in traditional rituals, continued to occur during the reporting period. There is little re-

liable information available about traditional religions associated with ritual killings, and the number of such killings is difficult to ascertain. Many believe that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn, who are concentrated in the southeast, engage in ritual killings. Body parts of a person believed to be powerful are considered the most effective for ritual purposes. In some cases, the rituals reportedly involve eating body parts to gain special powers. Fighters on all sides of the civil war reportedly engaged in such practices. In January, a dusk to dawn curfew was imposed in Maryland County after riots broke out over the Government's failure to address a spate of ritual killings. There were a few reports of ritual killings in and around Monrovia, but no evidence to support such claims.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other Embassy officers met with the IRC and other Christian and Muslim leaders to discuss religious freedom issues. The U.S. Government provided funding to the IRC and assisted with other logistical support to facilitate the IRC's work in promoting inter-religious dialogue and its efforts to end the civil conflict.

MADAGASCAR

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 228,880 square miles, and its population is approximately 17.5 million. Although precise official figures are unavailable, approximately half of the population is Christian. There are four main Christian denominations. The Roman Catholic Church is the largest denomination, followed by the Reformed Protestant Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). President Ravalomanana was re-elected to a second term as lay vice-president of the FJKM in August 2004. The Lutheran and Anglican Churches account for most of the remainder of the country's Christians. Most other citizens follow traditional indigenous religions. Muslims constitute slightly less than 10 percent of the population, with strong concentrations in the north and the northwest. Aboriginal and ethnic Indians and Pakistanis who immigrated over the past century make up the majority of the Muslims in the country. There is a small number of Hindus among the ethnic Indians.

There are several foreign missionary groups that operate freely. These include Catholics, Protestants of various denominations including Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Several faith-based organizations, some with international affiliations, are involved in health and social services, development projects, schools, and higher education.

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. President Ravalomanana has occasionally expressed a desire to transform the country into "a Christian State"; however, there has been no attempt to establish a state religion, and most believe his comments indicate a desire to enshrine Christian principles in the day-to-day life of the country.

The law mandates that religious organizations register with the Ministry of Interior. By registering, religious organizations acquire the legal status necessary to re-

ceive direct bequests and other gifts. To qualify as a religious association, groups must consist of at least 100 members, with an elected administrative council of no more than 9 members, each of whom must be a Malagasy citizen. If the group's leadership and faithful are foreign (as is the case with the majority of the country's Muslims), they have the right to form an association "reputed to be foreign." Once the association's membership expands to 1,000 members, the administrative council may apply to be recognized as a church. The state officially recognizes 9 churches and 83 religious organizations.

Religious organizations that fail to meet the Ministry of Interior's registration requirements are free to register as simple associations. Simple associations do not have the right to receive gifts or hold religious services. Ministry of Interior officials estimate there are more than 1,000 religious organizations in the country operating without official state recognition, including both simple associations and unregistered organizations.

The Malagasy Council of Christian Churches (FFKM) is the umbrella organization for the country's four principal Christian denominations. The FFKM is composed of the Roman Catholic, FJKM, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches, and is a key player in a broad range of issues. The FFKM is a traditional leader in education; recently its role has expanded to include coordinating a national campaign against HIV/AIDS and monitoring elections. In the political arena, the FFKM has generally served as a mediator, bringing together antagonistic factions; however, it has occasionally taken an overt position on political issues. During the 2001 presidential campaign and the ensuing political crisis, it supported Marc Ravalomanana, then mayor of Antananarivo, in his ultimately successful bid for the presidency. President Ravalomanana's position as a lay vice-president of FJKM still generates some allegations that church and state interests are not kept entirely separate. In April 2005, President Ravalomanana was criticized on these grounds following his keynote speech at a 3-day World Bank-sponsored FJKM colloquium on the role of church leaders in the country's development.

Christian holy days such as Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Assumption, All Saints' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedoms

Numerous religious organizations operate freely in all regions of the country, often disseminating their message through public and private media. Religious organizations are granted free access to state-run media provided that their use constitutes a public service. During the month of Ramadan, for example, the national television station broadcast a daily 15-minute program that included the call to prayer. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of any religious organizations that were denied free access to state-run media.

In August 2004, the Fianarantsoa Prefecture suspended the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (EURD) for inciting public disorder by allegedly burning a copy of the Bible during a ceremony in which "Satan's materials" were burned. In September 2004, 2 pastors and 15 church members who participated in the burning were sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment.

In early January 2005, the EURD was permitted to reopen, despite a petition by several Fianarantsoa citizens to have the church closed permanently. An investigation revealed that the EURD was not officially recognized as a religious association, and Ministry officials reported that it had been permitted to form an association "reputed to be foreign" in 1998. In 2002, the EURD sought recognition as an official religious association. At the time, since the leadership consisted entirely of foreign nationals, the request was denied. The Government counseled the EURD to elect a local board and reapply, but it never filed a new application. Therefore, the EURD had technically been operating illegally for over 2 years.

On January 11 the Ministry of Justice issued an order revoking the church's status as an association "reputed to be foreign." On January 28, a second order was sent to all provincial governors and regional chiefs calling for the closure of EURD churches nationwide and the expulsion of all foreign EURD pastors. As of March, only 11 of the 35 foreign EURD pastors had left the country. On March 17, 2005, one Ivoirian and two South African EURD pastors were arrested for failure to comply with this order.

In April 2005, the mayor of Antananarivo dispatched police units to break up an EURD service being held in a private residence. The group protested, since the judicial order only called for the closure of EURD churches, not the interdiction of private practice of one's faith. After the incident, EURD faithful announced their commitment to apply for recognition as an official religious association.

The Ministry of Interior confirmed receipt of several petitions from former EURD congregations to form a new official religious organization. The Ministry stated that

as long as the applications fulfilled the legal requirement of having Malagasy leadership they would likely be approved. Some of the foreign EURD pastors associated with these new applications have been permitted to remain in the country pending the outcome of their petition.

Religious services were suspended in two prisons during Easter Holy Week after several prisoners attempted to escape.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Ethnic Malagasy occasionally express resentment toward members of the predominantly Muslim Indo-Pakistani (“Karana”) community. This attitude derives from the relative economic prosperity of the Karana and is not based on their religious affiliation. Some members of the Muslim community state that the President’s failure to invite them to events featuring religious leaders marginalizes the community.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the Embassy regularly meet with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups. In April, an Embassy representative met with officials at the Ministry of Interior to discuss the status of the EURD. The Embassy provides materials to a small library at a major mosque in Antananarivo.

MALAWI

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; however, there were tensions between Christians and Muslims during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 45,747 square miles, and its population is approximately 11 million. More than 70 percent of the population is Christian. Among the Christian denominations, the largest are the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), with smaller numbers of Anglicans, Baptists, evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists. There is a substantial Muslim minority totaling approximately 20 percent of the population. The vast majority of Muslims are Sunni, adhering to either the Qadriya or Sukkutu groups. There are also Hindus, Baha’is, a small number of Rastafarians, and followers of traditional indigenous religions. There are few atheists.

Foreign missionary groups are present in the country, including Protestants, Catholics, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Islamic aid organizations.

Regional voting trends and political affiliation sometimes reflect the concentration of faiths in certain regions of 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. There is no state religion.

There are no separate requirements for the recognition of religions, but religious groups must register with the Government. A religious group must submit documentation detailing the structure and mission of its organization along with a nominal fee for review by the Ministry of Justice. Once approved, a religious group registers formally with the Registrar General's Office in Blantyre. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious groups.

The Government observes both Christian and Muslim holy days. Public holidays in the country include Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Foreign missionaries experienced occasional delays in renewing employment permits. This appeared to be the result of bureaucratic inefficiency rather than a deliberate government policy against foreign missionaries. Missionaries and charitable workers paid lower fees for employment permits than did other professionals.

The President, Bingu wa Mutharika, is Catholic and the Vice President is Muslim. Several cabinet members and parliamentarians are Muslim. President Mutharika regularly sends official regards to members of all faiths in the country on appropriate religious holidays.

As a result of previous debate, many public schools offer a course entitled "Bible Knowledge," which is Christian oriented, and another entitled "Moral and Religious Education," which includes Muslim, Hindu, Baha'i, and Christian material.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In May 2005, the Government and Rastafarian leaders came into conflict over a ban on long hair in public schools. The Rastafarian community, citing long dreadlocks as an expression of religion, called the ban discriminatory and threatened legal action. Government officials declared the prohibition was against long hair, not dreadlocks, and was not intended to infringe upon any religious rights.

Religious leaders were free to speak publicly on political and social issues.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were occasional tensions between Christians and Muslims. Although there were no significant conflicts, these minor tensions were especially evident following the presidential and parliamentary elections in May 2004, and they appeared to have been fueled largely by political candidates. Christians and Muslims generally coexist peacefully, often participating in business or civil-service organizations together. A small Hindu minority also participated in business and civil society.

In November 2004, a dispute between Muslims and Christians erupted over the proper burial rites for mixed-religion families. Following the death of a child whose Christian parents hailed from a Muslim-dominated community, religious leaders and relatives on both sides advocated for their views on burial rites. The dispute allegedly resulted in violence and vandalism after a series of inflammatory remarks. A Christian preacher was allegedly assaulted in the incident, and in May, several suspects were in custody awaiting trial for assault and malicious damage.

During the 2004 presidential and parliamentary campaign, some prominent Christian religious leaders frequently spoke about corruption, the electoral process, and the candidates. The church leaders were often openly critical of the ruling political party, and candidates and officials took issue with the churches' statements.

The Government did not attempt to restrict remarks of religious leaders; however it declared that such statements deviated from the proper role of religious leaders. Churches continued to be a significant source of political influence, particularly in rural areas.

In December 2004, a group of Muslims in Blantyre allegedly beat a Christian preacher for refusing to hand over a copy of the Qur'an. The preacher did not suffer serious injuries. No arrests were reported, and no further action was taken on the case during the reporting period.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the key instigators of the June 2003 riots following the deportation of five alleged Al-Qa'ida members had not gone to trial, although the cases were turned over to the Director of Public Prosecution. Tensions have since decreased and no further conflict has occurred, although some Muslim groups have continued to criticize publicly the Government's actions.

Political and community leaders have made active efforts to foster cooperation among religious groups. For example, in 2004, presidential and parliamentary candidates of various religious backgrounds attended a series of "Presidential Prayer Breakfasts" organized by a Christian group. Other invited guests included Muslim leaders, the diplomatic community, and civil society leaders.

The Public Affairs Committee (PAC), a nonprofit and politically unaligned local organization, was involved prominently in promoting civic education and human rights and was also active in monitoring the 2004 electoral process. PAC included representatives of various churches and mosques.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials maintained frequent contact with leaders and members of all religious communities in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy continued to promote religious tolerance through grants, meetings, exchange programs, and the distribution of reading materials. On several occasions, Embassy officials appeared on local radio programs to discuss issues of religious freedom and tolerance. In November 2004 and February 2005, an Embassy representative was interviewed and took calls from the public on a Radio Islam program.

Two Muslim journalists from Radio Islam and The Daily Times newspaper traveled to the U.S. in October 2004 on a U.S. Government-sponsored reporting tour concerning religious freedom in America. Upon returning to the country, the two published positive accounts of their experiences.

In September 2004, the Embassy sponsored a local Muslim group's project to encourage civic education and participation among rural people of all faiths.

MALI

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 474,764 square miles, and its population is approximately 11.5 million. Muslims make up an estimated 90 percent of the population; the vast majority of Muslims are Sunni. Approximately 5 percent of the population is Christian, and the Christian community is roughly two-thirds Catholic and one-third Protestant. The remaining 5 percent practices traditional indigenous religions or no religion. Atheism and agnosticism are rare. Most immigrants come from neighboring countries and either practice the majority Muslim faith or belong to a Christian denomination. The majority of citizens practice their religion daily.

Christian communities tend to be located in and around urban areas, generally in the southern regions. Groups that practice traditional indigenous religions are located throughout the country, but they are most active in rural areas.

Foreign Islamic preachers operate in the north, while mosques associated with Dawa (an Islamic fundamentalist group) are located in Kidal, Mopti, and Bamako. Dawa has gained adherents among the Bellah, who were once slaves of the Tuareg nobles, and also among unemployed youth. The interest these groups have in Dawa is associated with a desire to disassociate themselves from their former masters and, for the youth, to find a source of income. The Dawa group's strong influence in Kidal was less evident than in the previous reporting period, while the Wahhabi movement has grown in Timbuktu and Sikasso. In general, the country's traditional approach to Islam is peaceful and moderate.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country; the most numerous are Christian groups that are based in Europe and engage in development work, primarily the provision of health care and education. A number of U.S.-based Christian missionary groups also are present.

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; the Constitution defines the country as a secular state and allows for religious practices that do not pose a threat to social stability and peace.

The Government requires the registration of all public associations, including religious associations; however, registration confers no tax preference or other legal benefits, and failure to register is not penalized in practice. The registration process is routine and not burdensome. Traditional indigenous religions are not required to register.

Foreign missionary groups operate without government interference, and they do not link the benefits of their development activities to conversion. Members of various religious groups are allowed to proselytize freely.

Family law, including laws pertaining to divorce, marriage, and inheritance, is based on a mixture of local tradition and Islamic law and practice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Minister of Territorial Administration and Local Collectivities may prohibit religious publications that defame another religion; however, there were no reports of instances of such prohibitions during the period covered by this report.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Adherents of different faiths may be found within the same family. Many followers of one religion attend religious ceremonies of other religions, especially weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

In February 2005, Muslim and Christian organizations joined together to fight AIDS in Mali and registered with the Ministry of Interior. This alliance is also designed to be used by religious communities as a conflict resolution tool. The Government always consults with a "Committee of Wise Men" that includes the Archbishop and Protestant and Muslim leaders before making important decisions on potentially controversial issues regarding the nation.

Non-Muslim missionary communities live and work in the country without difficulty. Christian missionaries, particularly rural based development workers, enjoy good relations with their communities.

Islam as practiced in the country is generally tolerant and adapted to local conditions.

In May 2005, 11 Muslims were convicted of resisting authority, disobedience, and rebellion and sentenced to jail terms ranging from 6 months to 3 years for refusing to allow their children to receive polio vaccinations. The group to which they belong was gaining adherents in the region and was viewed as a serious threat to the polio eradication program since its members are taught to believe that matters pertaining to health should remain in God's hands.

In August 2003, in the village of Yerere, traditional Sunni practitioners attacked Wahhabi Sunnis, who were building an authorized mosque. Nine persons died and two were seriously wounded. The Government viewed the case as a serious breach of religious freedom. On April 11, 2005, the criminal court sentenced 5 of 104 defendants to death and 84 others to terms of between 3 months probation and 20 years imprisonment.

In November 2003, a statue of the Virgin Mary was vandalized, shortly before the annual Catholic pilgrimage to the town of Kita. Local authorities quickly responded to the incident and the responsible individual was arrested and prosecuted. Investigations revealed that the individual acted independently. He was sentenced to 3 years in prison and fined.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers meet regularly with religious authorities and government officials who deal with these issues.

Embassy officials expanded dialogue with Muslim groups to promote mutual understanding and to encourage the continued secularism of the Government. Embassy officials have also engaged Muslim groups through other events, including an Iftar offered to imams and members of the Muslim community and hosted at the Ambassador's residence in Bamako.

The Embassy invited four Malian imams to the U.S. on an International Visitor's Program, provided funding to restore and preserve manuscript collections in Timbuktu and Jenne, and distributed magazines and other materials printed in Arabic.

The U.S. Embassy maintains contact with the foreign missionary community and works with government officials and societal leaders to promote religious freedom.

MAURITANIA

The Constitution establishes the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the religion of its citizens and the state. The Government limits freedom of religion by prohibiting the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the proselytization of Muslims. In addition, three small West African Protestant groups, which held prayer sessions in members' homes, were told by police to stop meeting and encouraged to relocate their activities to the compound of the Catholic Church, where the Catholic Church and Evangelical Church hold regular meetings.

There were some changes 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 419,212 square miles, and its population is approximately 3 million. Almost the entire population practices Sunni Islam. There is a very small number of non-Muslims and Roman Catholic or denominational Christian churches have been established in Nouakchott, Atar, Zouerate, Nouadhibou, and Rosso. Although there are no synagogues, a very small number of expatriates practice Judaism.

There are several foreign faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) active in humanitarian and developmental work in the country. The largest is World Vision, involved in food and other aid projects. Other NGOs include World Advocates and Caritas, each providing various services including the provision of medical care, feeding centers, micro-finance and water treatment.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the religion of its citizens and the state. The Government limits freedom of religion by prohibiting the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the proselytization of Muslims; however, non-Muslim resident expatriates and a few non-Muslim citizens generally practice their religions openly and freely.

Both the Government and citizenry consider Islam to be the essential cohesive element unifying the country's various ethnic groups. There is a cabinet-level Ministry of Literacy Programs, Islamic Orientation, and Traditional Education. High Council of Islam, consisting of six imams, advises the Government on the conformance of legislation to Islamic precepts. Although the Government provided a small stipend to the imam of the Central Mosque in the capital, mosques and Qur'anic schools are normally supported by their members and other donors.

The Government does not register religious groups; however, secular NGOs, including humanitarian and development NGOs affiliated with religious groups, must register with the Ministry of the Interior. Nonprofit organizations, including both religious groups and secular NGOs, generally are not subject to taxation. The judiciary consists of a single system of courts with a modernized legal system that conforms with the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law).

The Government observes Muslim holy days as national holidays, but this practice does not negatively affect other religious groups. A magistrate of Shari'a, who heads a separate government commission, determines the lunar dates for observing religious holidays and addresses the nation on these days.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The implementation of Islamic law has created some limited restrictions on religious freedom. Shari'a, proclaimed the law of the land under a previous government in 1983, includes the Qur'anic prohibition against apostasy or conversion to a religion other than Islam; however, this prohibition has never been codified in civil law or enforced. The small number of known converts from Islam suffered no social ostracism, and there were no reports of societal or governmental attempts to punish them during the period covered by this report.

Although there is no specific legal prohibition against proselytizing by non-Muslims, in practice the Government prohibits such activity through the use of Article 11 of the Press Act. The act bans the publication of any material that is against, contradicts, or otherwise threatens Islamic principles. The Government views any attempts by practitioners of other religions to convert Muslims as undermining society. Foreign faith-based NGOs limit their activities to humanitarian and development assistance.

Under Article 11 of the Press Law, the Government may restrict the importation, printing, or public distribution of Bibles or other non-Islamic religious literature. In practice, Bibles are neither printed nor publicly sold in the country; however, the possession of Bibles and other non-Islamic religious materials in private homes is not illegal, and Bibles and other religious publications are available among the small non-Islamic communities.

Except for the President, the members of the 5-person Constitutional Council, and the 10-person High Council of Magistrates over which the President presides, government employees or members of the ruling political party are not required to take a religious oath. The Constitutional Council and the High Council of Magistrates advise the President in matters of law and the Constitution. The oath of office includes a promise to God to uphold the law of the land in conformity with Islamic precepts.

Both the privately run Qur'anic schools and the Government's public schools include classes on religion. These classes teach the history and principles of Islam and the classical Arabic of the Qur'an. Although attendance at these religious classes is ostensibly required, many students, the great majority of whom are Muslims, decline to attend them for diverse ethno-linguistic and religious reasons. Since these classes determine a disproportionately small percentage of the overall grade, students are able to advance in school and graduate with diplomas, provided they compensate for their failure to attend the religion classes by their performance in other classes.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Following the 2003 crackdown on Islamic activists, the Government closed a number of Saudi- and Gulf-funded Islamic schools and charities. These organizations remained closed at the end of the period covered by this report. The Government also

closed an Islamic charity association in 2003 for its alleged connections to local Islamic activists. The government-funded Institute for Islamic Science, Studies, and Research (ISERI), remained open and fully funded.

In March 2005, the Government arrested Islamists that it claimed were tied to terrorism. It detained approximately 60 individuals, including Islamist leaders Cheikh Mohamed El Hacem Ould Dedew and Moctar Ould Mohamed Moussa, both of whom remained in jail at the end period covered by this report. Both have been arrested and released repeatedly over the last few years. Most of the other detainees also remained imprisoned, although at least 12 were released after several days.

In May, as part of this crackdown, the Government began searching mosques, seizing Qur'anic texts and arresting mosque officials. The Government has also restricted the use of mosque loudspeakers exclusively for the call to prayer and Friday service. Many of those arrested, including Dedew and Moussa, have been charged with membership in unrecognized groups, inciting violence, and making harmful political statements at mosques.

A 2003 law prohibits the use of mosques for any form of political activity, including the distribution of propaganda and incitement to violence. While Islamists have been detained, the Government has held that this crackdown is aimed at fighting terrorism; however, NGOs claim that is aimed at suppressing political opposition. The terrorists' attack on June 4 against a military outpost in the northeast near the border with Mali has led citizens to conclude, as the Government has argued, that a terrorist threat exists and is growing.

In April, four small Protestant groups, which held prayer sessions in members' homes, were told by police to stop meeting until they received official recognition. In fact, no non-Islamic groups have ever been recognized, including the Catholic Church, which operates openly in its facility in Nouakchott. It is unclear, however, if the prohibition was a decision made at a high government level or the action of police officials acting on neighbors' complaints.

Shari'a law provides the legal principles upon which the country's law and legal procedure are based. The testimony of two women is necessary to equal that of one man. In addition, in awarding an indemnity to the family of a woman who has been killed, the courts grant only half the amount that they would award for a man's death. For commercial and other issues not addressed specifically by Shari'a, the law and courts treat women and men equally.

Excluding those Islamists previously mentioned, there were no additional 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There were no reported incidents of interreligious violence during this period. Several public protests were conducted against the Government's continued recognition of Israel, and derogatory statements were made about Jews. Small anti-Israeli protests took place before, during, and after the visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom on May 3. Anti-Israeli graffiti was also visible during this period.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Embassy monitors developments affecting religious freedom and maintains contact with imams and the leaders of other religious groups. These contacts include the Minister of Islamic Orientation, Literacy Programs, and Traditional Education.

The U.S. Ambassador actively engages prominent religious leaders in a dialogue to broaden mutual understanding of religious freedom principles, and to explain the freedom with which Muslims practice their religion in America. In May, an imam who leads a Maryland mosque came to Nouakchott to lecture on how Islam is prac-

ticed freely in the United States. In June, the U.S. Government contributed \$25,000 for the preservation of Islamic manuscripts.

MAURITIUS

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.

Tensions between the Hindu majority and Christian and Muslim minorities persist; however, members of each group worshipped without hindrance.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 718 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.2 million. In the 2000 census, an estimated 50 percent of the population claimed to be Hindu, 32 percent Christian, and 16 percent Muslim. Less than 1 percent claimed to be, atheist, agnostic, or of another faith. There are no official figures for those who actively practice their faith, but there are estimates that the figure is approximately 60 percent for all religious groups.

Approximately 85 percent of Christians are Roman Catholic. The remaining 15 percent are members of the following churches: Adventist, Assembly of God, Christian Tamil, Church of England, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Evangelical, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Sunnis account for more than 90 percent of Muslims; there are some Shi'a Muslims. Many Buddhists are also practicing Catholics and many citizens of Chinese ancestry send their children to the Loreto Convent primary schools in the major towns, which are managed by the Catholic diocese.

The north is more Hindu and the south is more Catholic. There also are large populations of Hindus and Catholics in the main cities from the capital of Port Louis to the central cities of Quatre Bornes and Curepipe, and most Muslims and Christian churches are concentrated in these areas. The offshore island of Rodrigues, with a population of approximately 36,000, is predominantly Catholic.

The country is a small island nation, and its ethnic groups, known as "communal groups," are tightly knit. Intermarriage is relatively rare, although the most recent census indicates that it is increasing. An individual's name usually identifies his or her ethnic and religious background. There is a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity usually are Hindus or Muslims. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practice both Buddhism and Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent usually are Catholic.

Foreign missionary groups operate, including the Baptist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

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.

Religious organizations that were present prior to independence, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, the Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims, are recognized in a parliamentary decree. These groups also receive an annual lump-sum payment from the Ministry of Finance based upon the number of adherents as determined by the census. Newer religious organizations (which must have a minimum of seven members) are registered by the Registrar of Associations and are recognized as legal entities with tax-exempt privileges. The Government is not known to have refused registration to any group.

Foreign missionary groups are allowed to operate on a case-by-case basis. Although there are no government regulations restricting their presence or limiting their proselytizing activities, groups must obtain both a visa and a work permit for

each missionary. The Prime Minister's office is the final authority on issuance of these required documents to missionaries. While there are no limits on the ability of missionaries to operate in the country, there are limits on the number of missionaries permitted to obtain the requisite visas and work permits.

National holidays are representative of the country's multi-religious, multiethnic population. Hindu (Maha Shivratri, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Divali), Tamil (Thaipusam Cavadee, and Ougadi), Christian (Christmas and All Saints' Day), and Muslim (Eid al-Fitr) holy days are national holidays.

The Ministry of Arts and Culture is responsible for promoting cultural interaction among different cultural components within the country, and in 2004 and 2005 ran daylong events aimed at fostering cultural (and therefore religious) understanding. For the second consecutive year, the Ministry held daylong activities for Divali and Eid al-Fitr. The Ministry also held a daylong celebration of Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. While for political reasons in the past the Government has favored the population's Hindu majority with greater access to government patronage, there were no reports that this continued during the period covered by this report.

Due to the predominance of Hindu citizens in the upper echelons of the civil service, some minorities, usually Creoles and Muslims, allege that they are prevented from reaching the highest levels of government. Despite this sentiment, a member of the Franco-Mauritian minority, Paul Raymond Berenger, became Prime Minister through a prearranged agreement between the parties of the governing coalition in 2003, making him the first Christian Prime Minister of the country. Elections were scheduled for July 3, 2005.

While some Creole political groups allege that Christian Creoles receive unjust treatment from the police, there was no evidence that this was based on religious differences. Observers believe that such incidents likely are a result largely of ethnic differences, since the police force predominantly is Indo-Mauritian and the fact that Creoles tend to live in poorer areas where crime is more prevalent. Tensions between Creoles and police were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Foreign missionaries sometimes are prohibited from residing in the country beyond five years (which would permit them to seek citizenship). Religious organizations are permitted to send new missionaries to replace them; however, groups sometimes encounter bureaucratic obstacles in obtaining work permits and residence visas for replacements. This occasionally prevents such organizations from replacing departing missionaries in a timely fashion.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

A committee consisting of religious leaders from each of the major religions met several times during the period covered by this report to discuss interreligious harmony. The committee set as its goal the development of a greater understanding between religious groups. In January 2005, the committee held a conference that focused both on mutual understanding and demonstrating the necessity for collaboration in promoting social harmony. The committee addressed several questions including the proper role of religion in society.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Tensions between the Hindu majority and Christian and Muslim minorities persist; however, no violent confrontations occurred during the period covered by this report.

There are 12 Catholic secondary schools, called Catholic Colleges, which are administered by the Catholic diocese and receive grants from the Government. The Private Secondary School Authority, which is a government body under the Ministry of Education, oversees the schools. In 2004, 50 percent of the available seats in these schools were allocated to pupils according to the certificate of primary edu-

cation results, and, therefore, were based on merit. The remaining 50 percent were allocated by the Catholic Church and were given to Catholic students. The President of the Hindu Teacher's Union, Suttuhudeo Tengur, challenged the constitutionality of this agreement between the Government and Catholic Church. Although the Government denied knowledge of a preference for Catholic students under its seat allocation policy, in April 2004 the Supreme Court decided in favor of Tengur's claims that religious beliefs should not be taken into account when pupils are admitted to these Catholic Schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In September 2004, the Embassy hosted a digital video conference on the topic of Muslim life in America; the event was attended by several local Muslim leaders.

MOZAMBIQUE

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; however, the Constitution bans religious denomination-based political parties as threats to national unity.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 308,642 square miles, and its population is approximately 19.4 million. According to the most recent National Institute of Statistics survey, conducted in 1998, half of the population does not profess to practice a religion or creed; however, scholars at local universities assert that virtually all of these persons recognize or practice some form of traditional indigenous religion. Of the approximately 8 million persons who profess a recognized religion, 24 percent are Roman Catholic, 22 percent are Protestant, and 20 percent are Muslim. Many Muslim clerics disagree with this statistic, claiming that Islam is the country's majority religion. Religious communities are dispersed throughout the country. The northern provinces are most strongly Muslim, particularly along the coastal strip, but some areas of the northern interior are strongly Protestant or Catholic. Catholics and Protestants are more numerous in the southern and central regions, but significant Muslim minority populations can be found in these areas as well. Government sources note that evangelical Christians represent the fastest growing religious group, with the number of young adherents under the age of 35 increasing most rapidly. Generally, religious communities tend to draw members from across ethnic, political, economic, and racial lines.

There are 675 religious denominations and 121 religious organizations registered with the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice. In the period covered by this report, 57 denominations and 14 religious organizations were registered. Major Christian denominations include Roman Catholic, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Seventh-day Adventist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Nazarene, and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as many other evangelical, apostolic, and pentecostal churches. African independent churches are growing in popularity, and nearly all of the several hundred denominations registered in recent years are small, independent Protestant, and some Catholic, churches that have split from mainstream denominations. These churches more directly fuse African traditional beliefs and practices within a Christian framework.

Only one Muslim denomination is registered, but many Muslim religious organizations are registered, such as the Islamic Council. Most of the Muslim community is Sunni, with a small but significant Shi'a minority, nearly all of whom are of South Asian origin. The distinction between Sunni and Shi'a is not particularly important for many local Muslims, and Muslims are much more likely to identify themselves by the local religious leader they follow, rather than as Sunni or Shi'a.

Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i groups are registered and constitute a small percentage of the population.

The country's leading mosques and churches have gradually eliminated many traditional practices from their places of worship, instituting practices that reflect a stricter interpretation of sacred texts. Nevertheless, most Christian and Muslim adherents incorporate some traditional indigenous practices and rituals, and religious authorities have generally been permissive of such practices. For example, members of these faiths commonly travel to ancestors' graves to say special prayers for rain. Christians and Muslims continue to practice a ritual of preparation or inauguration at the time of important events (for example, before a first job, a school examination, or a swearing-in) by offering prayers and spilling beverages on the ground to please ancestors. Some Christians and Muslims consult "curandeiros," traditional healers or spiritualists, some of whom themselves are nominal Christians or Muslims, in search of good luck, healing, and solutions to problems.

Dozens of foreign missionary groups operate freely. Most are Protestant evangelical groups, but Islamic and Catholic missionaries are strongly represented as well. Protestant missionary presence is strongest in the south, but missionary groups such as the Summer Institute of Languages Bible Translators are growing rapidly in the north. Muslim missionaries from South Africa have established Islamic schools, known as madrassahs, in many cities and towns in the northern provinces and provide scholarships for students from the south to study in South Africa. South Asian Muslim groups have also developed a missionary presence in recent years.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides that all citizens have the freedom to practice or not to practice a religion and gives religious denominations the right to pursue their religion aims freely, and the Government generally respects these rights 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 favor a particular religion, nor is there a state or dominant religion.

The law requires religious institutions and missionary organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice, reveal their principal source of funding, and provide the names of at least 500 followers in good standing. No particular benefits or privileges are associated with the registration process, and there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious group during the period covered by this report. The Christian Council reports that not all religious groups register, but unregistered groups worship unhindered by the Government.

There are no national holidays that are religious in nature, but the Government has a liberal leave policy to permit religious observance.

The Government routinely grants visas and residence permits to foreign missionaries. Like all foreign residents, missionaries face a somewhat burdensome process in obtaining legal residency; however, they generally conduct their activities without government interference.

The Constitution gives religious groups the right to acquire and own assets, and these institutions are allowed by law to own and operate schools, which are increasing in numbers. In 2003 and 2004, Islamic primary and secondary schools were established in the cities of Matola, Xai-Xai, Nampula, Nacala, and Pemba, many with financing from the African Muslim Agency or from prominent local Muslims, many of South Asian descent. A Sudanese organization has provided funding for the schools in Xai-Xai and Nampula. Several other schools are under construction or rehabilitation in other cities. Many Protestant organizations have also opened primary and secondary schools in recent years. On the university level, the Muslim community has financed the establishment of Mussa Bin Bique University in Nampula, which opened in 2002 and expanded in 2005. The Catholic University has educational facilities in Beira, Nampula, Cuamba, and Pemba. Religious instruction is a primary focus of the new primary and secondary schools, but the universities associated with religious denominations do not emphasize or even offer religious studies. In fact, many students at Catholic University branches are Muslim, particularly in Pemba. Religious instruction in public schools is strictly prohibited.

A conference of bishops, including Catholic and Anglican members, meets regularly and consults with the President of the Republic. Throughout the period covered by this report, these groups freely held seminars and produced Pastoral Letters. There has been increased engagement by religious leaders on issues such as HIV/AIDS and trafficking in persons. Activities and positions were reported in the press without restriction.

In August 2004, the Government enacted a new Family Law, which replaces the colonial-era Civic Code and brings the law into compliance with equality provisions of the Constitution. The new law raises the marriage age to 18 for both males and females, eliminates the husband's de facto status as head of the family, and legalizes civil, religious, and common law unions. The law does not legally recognize polygyny; however, women in polygamous marriages are granted full marital and inheritance rights.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the law governing political parties specifically forbids religious parties from organizing and any party from sponsoring religious propaganda. The Independent Party of Mozambique (PIMO), a predominantly Muslim group without representation in Parliament, took positions based on Muslim religious principles, advocated its views on moral behavior, and criticized the government for corruption. The Government has tolerated PIMO's activities, and PIMO has been able to campaign in public without interference. In the December 2004 presidential and legislative elections, PIMO campaigned vigorously but attracted little support, gaining approximately 1 percent of the vote.

Most places of worship nationalized by the Government in 1975 have been returned to their respective religious organizations; however, the Catholic Church and certain Muslim communities claimed that some other properties, including schools, health centers, and residences, unjustly remain in state hands. The groups continued to request their return. The Directorate for Religious Affairs is mandated to address the issue of the restitution of church properties. Government sources stated that the majority of properties were returned, with a few cases still being examined on an individual basis, including two cases in Maputo that remained unresolved by the end of the period covered by this report. Return of the properties often is delayed due to construction of new facilities, particularly schools and health clinics. Provincial governments have the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restitution. The Papal Nunciature indicates that properties are generally returned in poor condition, due to lack of government resources.

The Islamic community has completed construction of a Grand Mosque in downtown Maputo and is rehabilitating the city's oldest mosque. The mosque was formally inaugurated in late 2003 and services are held there. The Hindu temple in Maputo, which was inaugurated in 2002, is the first official Hindu temple in the country in 80 years.

In June 2004, 14 American Protestant evangelical missionaries were expelled from the northern city of Montepuez; however, the reason for their expulsion was not religious, and they were able to re-establish missionary activities in other areas of the north.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among communities of different faiths generally are amicable, especially at the grassroots level. No religiously inspired altercations between members of different faiths were reported during this period. Within the Islamic community, the black and Indian communities tend to remain separate, with each group generally attending different mosques and schools. While relations between blacks and second-generation Indians are generally good, cultural conflict between black communities and recent South Asian immigrants has led to tensions and some isolated criminal incidents.

The 7-year-old Inter-Religious Forum, an organization for social and disaster relief composed of members of the Christian Council of Mozambique, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Muslim, Baha'i, and Jewish communities, is an example of interfaith cooperation. The goal of the forum is to offer collective assistance to the needy, regardless of creed. They officially established themselves as an organization in 2002, after at least a year of relative inactivity. During the period covered by this report, the forum conducted limited campaigns to promote HIV/AIDS prevention.

The Catholic Church continues to encourage the evolution of the country's political system.

Two prominent Christian figures, Reverend Jamisse Taimo and Reverend Arao Litsure, have chaired the last three National Elections Commissions, in 1999, 2003, and 2004. In 2004, religious leaders also served as chairmen of provincial election commissions in many areas. While President Guebuza is Presbyterian, most prominent figures in the government are Catholic; only two members of President Guebuza's cabinet are Muslim. However, all major religions and denominations are strongly represented in the National Assembly and in various government ministries.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Government actions in support of religious freedom have involved a variety of presentations on human rights matters to the Government. The Ambassador and Embassy officials also held several meetings with representatives of faith-based nongovernmental organizations, Catholic bishops, the Papal Nunciature, and numerous American missionaries.

In November 2004, at the close of Ramadan, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar at her residence, which nine prominent local Muslim leaders attended. One of the clerics praised the Embassy for helping bridge the divide between the local American and Muslim communities.

NAMIBIA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 320,827 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.8 million. Over 90 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christian. The two largest denominations are the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches, while smaller numbers are affiliated with the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). There are also a number of Zionist Churches (a mixture of traditional African beliefs and Pentecostal Christianity), especially in urban areas. The Afrikaner ethnic group is the predominant patron of the Dutch Reformed Church of Namibia.

The Himba, an ethnic group that constitutes less than 1 percent of the population, practice a traditional indigenous religion oriented toward their natural environment in the desert northwest. The San people, who constitute less than 3 percent of the population, also practice a traditional indigenous religion. Other religions include Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and the Baha'i Faith. Practitioners of these religions predominantly are immigrants, descendants of immigrants, or recent converts. They reside primarily in urban areas. There are few atheists in the country.

Foreign missionary groups, including Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Mormons, and Baha'is, operate 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. There is no state religion, nor does the Government subsidize any particular denomination.

The Government does not formally recognize any religion. However, government and senior ruling party officials continue to publicly emphasize the role of three

Christian denominations—Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic—in mobilizing political support during the country's struggle for independence.

There are no registration requirements for religious organizations.

The Government recognizes the holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas Day as national holidays.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In April, the Council of Churches of Namibia elected as President a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and as General Secretary a member of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives had frequent contact with citizens and foreign visitors from a wide variety of religious faiths. The Embassy continued to support activities that encourage religious tolerance and respect for human rights through the Democracy and Human Rights Fund.

NIGER

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. While the country's religious homogeneity minimizes sectarian tensions, there was one incident of violence between mainstream Sunni Muslims and members of a Wahhabist Sunni group.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 490,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 11.3 million. Islam is the dominant religion and is practiced by more than 90 percent of the population. There also are small communities of Christians and Baha'is. Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, account for less than 5 percent of the population but are present particularly in the regions of Maradi, Dogondoutchi, Niamey, and other urban centers with expatriate populations. Christianity was the religion of French colonial institutions, and its followers include many local believers from the educated, the elite, and colonial families, as well as Africans from neighboring coastal countries, particularly Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Numbering only a few thousand, the Baha'i are located primarily in Niamey and in communities on the west side of the Niger River, bordering Burkina Faso. A small percentage of the population practices traditional indigenous religions. There is no information available regarding the number of atheists.

Active Christian missionary organizations include Southern Baptists, evangelical Baptists, Catholics, Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventists, Service in Mission (SIM), and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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.

No religious group was subsidized; however, the Islamic Association, which acts as an official advisory committee on religious matters to the Government, conducted biweekly broadcasts on the government-controlled television station. Christian programming was broadcast on private and government radio stations, although the government stations would typically broadcast it only on Sundays and on special occasions, such as Christmas and Easter.

Religious organizations must register with the Interior Ministry. This registration is a formality, and there is no evidence that the Government favors any religion over another or that it ever has refused to register a religious organization. Approval is based on submission of required legal documents and the vetting of organization leaders. The Government must also authorize construction of any place of worship; however, there were no reports that the Government refused construction permits during the period covered by this report.

Foreign missionaries work freely, but their organizations must be registered officially as associations. In addition to proselytizing, most missionary groups generally offered development or humanitarian assistance. The Christian community in Galmi, Tahoua region, housed a hospital and health center run by SIM missionaries. The hospital and health center have been in operation for more than 40 years.

Public school instruction is conducted in French, and there are also public bilingual schools which conduct class in French and Arabic. The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

Christmas, Easter Monday, Eid el-Adha, Muharram, the Prophet's birthday, Lailatoul-Quadr, and Eid el-Fitr are recognized as national holidays. It is not uncommon for Muslims and Christians to attend each other's festivities during these holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The two Islamic organizations banned by the Government in 2001 for threatening a foreign embassy and calling for jihad against the secular state remained banned throughout the period covered by this report. No mainstream Islamic organizations or human rights organizations have challenged the legality of the bans.

The Constitution forbids political parties from having a doctrine based on any religious ideology.

The Government does not impose religious speech restrictions as long as there is no intent to disrespect public order, social peace, and national unity. Some senior-level government employees are required to take religious oaths. The Constitution specifies that the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of the National Assembly, and the President of the Constitutional Court must take an oath on a holy book of their own choosing. Members of the Constitutional Court, Independent National Election Commission, and High Council for Communications must do the same. In February, the Government proposed a law to the National Assembly under which judges would be required to take a religious oath. The proposed legislation proved controversial among members of the judiciary, intelligentsia, and civil society. The National Assembly removed the bill from its calendar in May.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, on March 31, concurrent with popular protests against a new tax, approximately 100 protesters threw stones at, and burned tires in front of, an American missionary church compound in Maradi. No one was killed or injured during the incident. While eyewitnesses reported that the protesters chanted "Allah Akbar," the motives for the attack were not entirely clear. Maradi had experienced turbulence throughout the day due to protests against the new tax. Tire burning and stone throwing occurred in many parts of the city. Police responded quickly, arrested approximately 60 protesters at the compound, and deployed additional officers around it. Missionaries more recently stated that they had not experienced any threatening behavior since March 31, and that they were satisfied with the police response.

In May, groups of mainstream Sunni youths demonstrated in the northern city of Agadez against provocative sermons and other criticisms by members of the Wahhabist Izalay sect. The youths burned a makeshift Izalay mosque. After 3 days of consultations between leaders of both communities hosted by the regional governor, mainstream Sunni leaders agreed to compensate the Izalists for damages to their mosque.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy regularly emphasizes the importance of tolerance in its public statements and in meetings with government officials and members of civil society.

As part of its continued outreach to the Muslim community, the Embassy hosted a series of Iftars during Ramadan. The Embassy also sent persons to the U.S. for programs on Islam in America. In July 2004, a Fulbright scholar gave a presentation on Islam and the law in the country. This led to a conference at a local university, at which an Embassy representative spoke on Islamic life in America. In May, an American imam discussed the role of Muslims in the United States during an Embassy-sponsored speaking tour of the country. Embassy officers maintained regular contact with Muslim religious leaders, community members, and students.

The U.S. Embassy maintains good relationships with evangelical Christian religious groups, most of which are staffed by long-term resident missionaries and well-known members of the American community. Embassy officials also have contact with the Catholic diocese, the Baha'i community, and Islamic organizations. Following the protest in Maradi, Embassy representatives contacted local police to corroborate the report and request additional police protection for the missionary compound. The Embassy followed up with the missionaries on subsequent occasions to ensure their safety.

NIGERIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. While the Federal Government generally respects religious freedom, there were some instances in which limits were placed on religious activity to address security and public safety concerns.

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

Interreligious tension between Christians and Muslims remained high in some areas, and there were several violent economic, ethnic, and political conflicts that took on religious overtones. A government census is scheduled for 2005, the first since 1991. The Muslim and Christian communities each believe the census will show them to be the majority, and many in both communities remain apprehensive of being a minority.

The U.S. Government broached and actively pursued several religious freedom-related issues, and this is an important part of the U.S. Mission's program. The Ambassador and the Mission have taken an active role in discussing and advocating these issues with government, religious and community leaders, and are involved in these issues country-wide. The Mission has also devoted substantial funding and projects to various aspects of religious freedom and outreach, which were implemented by several agencies and sections of the Mission.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 356,700 square miles and its population is estimated at 137 million. There are no accepted figures for the proportion of Nigerians who practice Islam or Christianity; it is generally assumed the numbers are roughly equal, and that there are a substantial number who practice traditional indigenous religions alongside Christianity or Islam. The predominant form of Islam in the country is Sunni. The Christian population includes Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and a growing number of Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians and Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

There is a strong correlation between religious differences and ethnic and regional diversity. The north, dominated by the large Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, is predominantly Muslim with significant numbers of Christians. Both Muslims and Christians are found in large numbers in the Middle Belt. In the southwest, where the large Yoruba ethnic group is the majority, there is no dominant religion. Most Yorubas practice either Christianity or Islam, while others continue to practice the traditional Yoruba religion, which includes a belief in a supreme deity and the worship of lesser deities that serve as the supreme deity's agents in aspects of daily life. In the east, where the large Igbo ethnic group is dominant, Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists are the majority, although many Igbos continue to observe traditional rites and ceremonies in tandem with Christianity.

The Government has announced that it will conduct a nationwide census within the next year, and there has been much controversy over whether to count religion and ethnicity.

Christian missionaries from many denominations operate freely. Rough estimates put the number of foreign Christian missionaries at more than 1,000 with many residing in the area around Jos in the Middle Belt's Plateau State. Many Christian missionaries have been present for a decade or longer. There are fewer foreign Muslim missionaries, and they generally stay for shorter periods of time than their Christian counterparts.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. While the Federal Government generally respects religious freedom, there were some instances in which limits were placed on religious activity to address security and public safety concerns.

The Government remained a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference during the period covered by this report. However, there is no state religion.

There are 36 states; governors have substantial autonomy in all decision making but derive the vast majority of their resources from the Federal Government. The Constitution prohibits state and local governments from adopting an official religion; however, some Christians have alleged that Islam has been adopted as a de facto state religion in several northern states, citing the reintroduction of criminal law aspects of Shari'a and the continued use of state resources to fund the construction of mosques, the teaching of Kadis (Shari'a judges), and pilgrimages to Mecca (Hajj). However, several states, including northern states, use government revenues to fund Christian activities, including pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In general, state governments, whether dominated by Christians or Muslims, tend to lean toward the faith practiced by the majority of residents.

The Constitution provides that states may elect to use Islamic (Shari'a) laws and courts. There are 12 northern states that have adopted at least parts of Shari'a law—Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Borno, Zamfara, and Gombe. Adherence to Shari'a provisions is compulsory for Muslims in some states and optional in others. Non-Muslims are not required in any state to submit to Shari'a jurisdiction. In some states they have the option, which may work to a defendant's advantage when the penalty under Shari'a is less severe, such as paying a fine rather than a jail sentence under secular law. Defendants have the right to challenge the constitutionality of Shari'a criminal statutes through the secular courts. As in the previous reporting period, no challenges with adequate legal standing reached the secular appellate system. The Constitution also provides for the Federal Government to establish a Federal Shari'a Court of Appeal and a Final Court of Appeal; however, the Government has not yet established such courts.

Christian and Islamic groups planning to build new churches or mosques are required by law to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The CAC did not deny registration to any religious group during the period covered by this

report. Many nascent churches and Islamic congregations ignored the registration requirement, and a small number, most notably those in Abuja, had their places of worship shut down or demolished when the zoning laws were enforced.

Both Federal and state governments were involved in the regulation of mandatory religious instruction in public schools.

Some state governors actively encouraged interfaith and interethnic discussions and took steps to prevent further violence and tension. The Government encouraged the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Kano-based Inter-Ethnic Forum, the Kaduna-based Inter-Faith Mediation Center, and the Muslim/Christian Dialogue Forum. At the national level, the Government established an Inter-Religious Council, consisting of prominent Muslim and Christian leaders.

Each year the Government observes the following Islamic and Christian holy days as national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, Christmas, and Boxing Day.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government required permits for outdoor public functions; government authorities and those assembling often ignored this requirement. In June 2005, an Abuja High Court ruled that long-standing legal provisions banning gatherings whose political, ethnic, or religious content might lead to unrest were unconstitutional.

Several state governments continued to ban public mass-rally proselytizing to avoid ethno-religious violence. However, some proselytizing groups remained active despite these formal bans, which generally were enforced on a case-by-case basis, and large outdoor religious gatherings were still common. In August 2004, Kwara State authorities cut short a planned 5-day rally by German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke after only 2 days, citing security concerns.

In 2003, the National Broadcasting Commission ruled that televangelists who broadcasted religious miracles would be required to provide evidence to prove the authenticity of the alleged miracles. The Lagos High Court ordered a suspension of the ruling pending its hearing of a lawsuit contesting the policy. The suit was not heard during the reporting period, and some evangelists continued to broadcast miracles.

Although distribution of religious publications was generally unrestricted, the Government sporadically enforced a ban against broadcasting religious advertisements on state-owned radio and television stations.

In Zamfara State, all criminal cases involving Muslims must be heard by a Shari'a court. Other states with Shari'a law permit Muslims to choose secular courts for criminal cases; however, societal pressure compelled most Muslims to use the Shari'a court system. There were complaints that some Kadis (Shari'a judges) applied harsher penalties in adultery and fornication cases against women than in such cases against men and that stronger evidence was required to convict men than to convict women.

There are no laws barring women or any groups from testifying in secular court or that give less weight to their testimony; however, the testimony of women and non-Muslims usually is accorded less weight in Shari'a courts.

In the north, there is a long tradition of separating schoolchildren according to gender. Some form of gender segregation occurred in many secondary schools in the north. In December, the Kano State Commissioner of Education announced that public and private school pupils should observe "decent standards of dress," although non-Muslim girls would not be required to wear the hijab headscarf.

The federal Government continued to ban religious organizations from primary school campuses although individual students retained the right to practice their religions in registered places of worship. The Constitution does not require students to receive instruction in a religion other than their own; however, the Ministry of Education requires public school students to undergo either Islamic or Christian religious instruction. State authorities claim that students are permitted not to attend classes taught in a religion other than their own and that students may request a teacher of their own religion to provide alternative instruction. However, there were often no teachers of "Christian Religious Knowledge" in many northern schools, and of "Muslim Religious Knowledge" in some southern schools.

Christians in the predominantly Muslim northern states continued to allege that local government officials used zoning regulations to stop or slow the establishment of new churches. Muslims continued to complain that they were denied permission to build mosques in predominantly Christian southern states. Officials responded that many of these new churches and mosques were being constructed in residential neighborhoods not zoned for religious purposes. State officials also stated that the

certification boards were dealing with a large backlog of cases for all applicants regardless of religious faith.

Although the expanded Shari'a laws technically do not apply to non-Muslims, the non-Muslim minority has been affected by certain social provisions associated with Shari'a, such as the separation of the sexes in public schools, and health and transportation services. Many social provisions associated with Shari'a have roots in the country's pre-Islamic societies and were in practice before the states adopted Shari'a. Although most states have not criminalized alcohol consumption by non-Muslims, in May 2004, Kano State announced that non-Muslims will be fined approximately \$380 (50,000 naira) or up to a year in prison for drinking or selling alcohol in certain public places; however there were no reports of non-Muslims being penalized during the reporting period. In some northern states, the sale and public consumption of alcohol have been restricted, except on Federal Government installations, such as military and police barracks. Kano State announced in May that commercial motorcycle taxis could no longer take women as passengers because, it claimed, the transport of women on motorcycles was contrary to Shari'a (Islamic law). The state government did not cite any specific Quranic references in announcing the ban. Both Muslim and non-Muslim women were affected by the ban. Some other states continued to offer only gender-segregated transportation.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Constitution permits capital punishment; although several Shari'a courts, as well as secular courts, sentenced persons to death, no Shari'a death sentences were implemented during the period covered by this report.

In September 2004, in Bauchi State, Daso Adamu, a nursing mother, was sentenced to death by stoning when she initially admitted to having sex with her first husband after her second husband absconded. The man was freed for lack of evidence. In October, she was released on bail on the grounds that she was breastfeeding. In December, a Shari'a appeals court vacated the conviction and sentence, ruling that her pregnancy was insufficient evidence to convict her.

In October 2004, in Bauchi State, Hajara Ibrahim was sentenced to death by stoning for adultery after becoming pregnant outside of wedlock. According to the Shari'a court that convicted her, she confessed to having sex with a man who had promised to marry her. The man denied meeting her and was released for lack of evidence. The defendant appealed the sentence, stating that she should have been charged with the lesser crime of fornication, rather than adultery. In November, a Shari'a appeals court overturned the conviction and sentence, ruling that she had never consummated an arranged marriage, and therefore should never have been charged with adultery.

The Nigeria Legal Aid Council agreed to appeal 30 Shari'a convictions and death sentences in Bauchi State. In one case, an 18-year-old man, Saleh Dabo, alleged that police told him he could plead guilty to rape, and he would be released; instead, a court sentenced him to death by stoning for adultery, even though he is not married. The appeal has not yet been heard.

Muslims convicted of crimes under Shari'a law were sentenced to public caning for minor offenses, such as petty theft, public consumption of alcohol, and prostitution. Unlike in the past, there were no reports that states administered amputations or canings pursuant to Shari'a law during the period covered by this report. There are numerous Shari'a cases pending appeal or implementation of sentence, including pending amputation and stoning sentences in Jigawa, Bauchi, Niger, Kano, and Zamfara States. Many of these cases have been delayed continuously for various reasons.

In May 2005, a Shari'a Appeals Court in Kaduna overturned amputation sentences that had been passed in 2003 against six Zaria men who had been accused of stealing a cow and a motorcycle. The Appeals Court ruled that the lower court had erred in convicting the men solely on the basis of police testimony, without allowing the men to defend themselves. The men also had not had access to legal representation, as required by the Kaduna State Shari'a code.

Human rights groups reported that many indigent persons convicted of Shari'a offenses claimed they had not known they were entitled to legal representation.

A number of states with expanded Shari'a law have sanctioned private Shari'a enforcement vigilante groups (known as Hisbah). In some cases these groups have had authority to make arrests, but generally the groups are empowered only to "advise" possible Shari'a offenders. The Hisbah groups were not very active during the period covered by this report.

In 2003, the Kaduna State Court ordered the Government to release an imam from the Kaduna central mosque whom the Government had detained earlier that year. The Government did not respond to the court order, nor produce the imam.

The imam is assumed to still be in custody, although there have been no updates during the period covered by this report. There were no other reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

There were also instances of violence by security forces.

On October 15, 2004, the second day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, police killed two persons and wounded three or four others in Gusau, the capital of mostly Muslim Zamfara State in the northwest. A crowd had approached the state government's building to demand traditional Ramadan alms from the Zamfara State Governor. Police at the gates stopped the crowd from advancing, a scuffle ensued, and police opened fire.

The Adamawa State governor dethroned the ethnic Bachama traditional ruler for his role in inciting violence between ethnic Bachama Christians and ethnic Hausa Muslims in Numan in June 2004. Later the governor named a new traditional leader for the Bachama. In early February 2005, police killed at least two persons and arrested at least 30 others who were protesting the appointment of the new ruler, claiming that he had no mandate to rule over them.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Interreligious tension between Christians and Muslims remained high in some areas, and there were several violent economic, ethnic, and political conflicts that took on religious overtones.

Religious differences often mirror regional and ethnic differences. For example, persons in the North and in parts of the Middle Belt are overwhelmingly Muslim and from the large Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups that tend to dominate these areas. Many southern ethnic groups are predominantly Christian. In many areas of the Middle Belt, Muslim Fulani tend to be pastoralists, while the Muslim Hausa and most Christian ethnic groups tend to be farmers or work in urban areas. Consequently ethnic, regional, economic, and land use competition often coincide with religious differences between the competing groups.

It is not unusual for different ethnic groups with a long history of conflict to have adopted different religions with the effect of exacerbating existing tensions. Communal conflicts in Plateau and Kano States in 2004 led to deaths of thousands and a state of emergency in Plateau State for much of the reporting period. The suspended state government returned to office when the state of emergency expired in November. There have been minor incidents of violence in Plateau State since, but not on the scale of the previous reporting period.

Predominantly ethnic/economic confrontations broke out during the reporting period in Jigawa, Kogi, Adamawa, Bauchi, Plateau, Benue, Kwara, and Taraba States, sometimes spilling over into religious conflict. Numerous persons were killed, injured, or displaced as a result of these conflicts. There were incidents in which mobs, aroused by economic, land, and political disputes, arbitrarily targeted persons of specific religious and ethnic affiliations.

There were also instances of violence primarily based on religious issues and/or because of their religious affiliations. In February in Sokoto State, at least three persons were killed and dozens injured in fighting between groups of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Shi'a supporters of militant Sheikh Zakzaky claimed their public commemoration of Ashura was attacked in an attempt to stop their procession, and one person was killed. They blamed the Sultan of Sokoto, who is the head of Nigeria's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, and some days later there was a fight at the mosque in front of the Sultan's palace.

On December 9 2004, at a major university in Bauchi State, a group of Muslim students abducted and killed the head of a Christian campus organization in retaliation for what they considered to be insults to Islam by Christian students. As tensions grew and property was vandalized, authorities responded by closing the university and a nearby polytechnic. Authorities subsequently established an interfaith dialogue and the university reopened for exams on February 28, while the polytechnic reopened on April 12. No further violence was reported.

No further action was taken, nor is further action likely, in connection with the church and mosque burnings in Kebbi, Kaduna, Ebonyi, and Jigawa States in 2004.

No one remained in detention from these incidents, nor is further action likely in relation to the 2003 unrest in Jigawa and Plateau States.

The law prohibits religious discrimination in employment and other practices; however, private businesses frequently discriminated on the basis of religion or ethnicity in their hiring practices and purchasing patterns. In nearly all states, ethnic rivalries between “indigene” groups and “settlers” led to some societal discrimination against minority ethnic and religious groups.

Although many non-Muslims feared that implementation of Shari’a would change their way of life, there has been little or no change in the daily lives of most non-Muslims. While some state and local governments interpreted the new Shari’a laws stringently, the majority of states and local governments interpreted and implemented their laws less stringently. There also is a trend developing among some segments of the Muslim community to shift focus away from the criminal law aspects of Shari’a law to its tenets of social justice and charity for the poor. Islamic scholars and many Muslim lawyers have begun educating the poor and the less well informed about their procedural rights under Shari’a. Several lawyers offer free services to the indigent in cases with potentially severe punishments.

In many areas, girls are discriminated against in their access to education for social and economic reasons; religious beliefs sometimes are a factor. Girls living in the more traditional rural areas, both in the predominantly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south, are disadvantaged more than their urban counterparts.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Mission regularly raised religious freedom issues with various federal, state, and local officials, and with prominent citizens. The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Mission and in statements from officials in Washington, sought to encourage a peaceful resolution of the question regarding Shari’a criminal penalties in a way that would be compatible with recognized international human rights norms and urged that human rights and religious freedom be respected in all instances.

The U.S. Mission made an especially strong effort to promote religious reconciliation between Christians and Muslims. The Mission hosted Iftars in both Abuja and Lagos, along with an Iftar in the predominantly Muslim Kwara State, in which both Muslims and Christians participated. Mission officers traveled extensively to the individual states to meet with Christian and Muslim leaders throughout the year and further that outreach.

The U.S. Mission reached out to Muslim communities in several programs, including the International Visitor Program, the American Speaker Program, the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program, the Humphrey Fellowship Program. The U.S. Mission also continued publishing its informational magazine in Hausa, the language of the predominantly Muslim north.

In August 2004, the Mission nominated Kano State Radio news manager Ali Lawal Umar to participate in the “Pluralism and Religious Diversity” tour program organized by the Foreign Press Center in Washington from August 2–13. On his return to Nigeria, Mr. Umar wrote news reports and commentaries urging the Kano community to learn from the U.S. experience. He also hosted two 30-minute discussion programs that brought Muslim and Christian leaders together to examine pluralism and peaceful coexistence based on Mr. Umar’s U.S. tour experience.

In December 2004, the Embassy presented ACCESS Micro-Scholarships to 20 talented needy students, 10 each in the Muslim heartlands of Kano and Zaria, to acquire a good education through enhanced English language teaching. In accepting the awards, the principals of the benefiting schools said the inclusive process of selecting the students has sown a seed of respect for diversity and tolerance for religious differences.

RWANDA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, while the Government generally respects this right in practice, it fails to prevent local authorities from abusing or restricting religious freedoms.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report; however, there were multiple reports that local authorities harassed and detained members of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Pentecostal groups. Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to have trouble in some provinces with their children

being expelled from school. Relations between the Government and the Catholic Church continued to improve.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,169 square miles, and its population is approximately 8.2 million. A 2001 study conducted by a foreign university reported that 49.6 percent of the population was Catholic, 43.9 percent Protestant, 4.6 percent Muslim, 1.7 claimed no religious affiliation, and 0.1 percent practiced traditional indigenous beliefs. This study indicated a 19.9 percent increase in the number of Protestants, a 7.6 percent drop in the number of Catholics, and a 3.5 percent increase in the number of Muslims from the 1996 U.N. Population Fund survey. The figures for Protestants include the growing number of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical Protestant groups. There also is a small population of Bahá'ís and Jews. There has been a proliferation of small, usually Christian-linked schismatic religious groups since the 1994 Genocide.

Foreign missionaries and church-linked nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of various faiths operate, including Trocaire, Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Federation, World Vision, World Relief, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Norwegian Church Aid, Salvation Army, Direct Aid (formerly the African Muslim Agency), Jesuit Relief Society, Christian Aid, Christian Direct Outreach, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, African Evangelical Enterprise, and Jesus Alive Ministries. Foreign missionaries openly promote their religious beliefs, and the Government has welcomed their development assistance.

There is no indication that religious belief is linked directly to membership in any political party. The Constitution states that political organizations are prohibited from basing themselves on race, ethnic group, tribe, clan, region, sex, religion, or any other division which may give rise to discrimination. Of the eight parties, the only one with a religious component to its name modified its title from the Democratic Islamic Party (PDI) to the Ideal Democratic Party, to comply with the Constitution. However, the party has always claimed to have non-Muslim members.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, while the Government generally respects this right in practice, it fails to prevent local authorities from abusing or restricting religious freedoms. There is no state religion.

The law provides for small fines and imprisonment of up to 6 months for anyone who interferes with a religious ceremony or with a minister in the exercise of his or her professional duties. The law regulates public meetings and calls for fines or imprisonment for those who violate these regulations.

In 2001, the Government promulgated a law giving it more influence over NGOs as well as religious institutions and organizations. The law requires NGOs to present their aims and plan of action to local authorities for "provisional agreement," and then to apply to the Ministry of Justice for legal recognition. Since the law was implemented, the Ministry of Justice has registered 11 new religious groups, including 5 during the period covered by this report. The Ministry did not deny any new applications; however, the Government continued the 2003 suspension of two "radical" splinter organizations, the "Eglise Methodiste Unie au Rwanda" (the United Methodist Church of Rwanda) led by Jupa Kaberuka, and the "Communauté Methodiste Union Internationale" (the International Union Methodist Community) led by Louis Bwanakweli, both of which attempted to register as the primary Methodist group in the country. The dispute between the two organizations was before the courts at the end of the reporting period. However, in general, no group's religious activities were curtailed as a result of difficulties or delays in the registration process.

There were reports that numerous religious organizations operated without legal recognition because the process is arduous, which government officials confirmed.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In some cases, students are given a choice between instruction in "religion" or "morals." In the past, missionaries established schools that were operated by the Government. In those schools, religious instruction tends to reflect the denomination of the founders, either Catholic or Protestant. Muslim private schools operate as well.

The Government observes five holy days as official holidays: Christmas, Easter, Eid-al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, and Assumption. The Government recognition of these holy days does not negatively impact any religious groups.

Relations between the Government and the Catholic Church continued to improve because of collaboration and dialogue in the areas of education and reconciliation. In March 2004, the Government participated in a conference with the Catholic Church on the 1994 Genocide.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government forbade religious meetings at night on the grounds that insurgents formerly used the guise of nighttime "religious meetings" to assemble their supporters before attacking nearby targets; however, during the period covered by this report, the Government allowed such meetings if religious groups provided advance notification. Religious leaders reportedly cooperated with the Government in limiting nighttime religious meetings and did not view the restriction as an infringement on their religious freedom. The Government continued to require religious groups to hold services at their established places of worship and to ban the use of private homes for this purpose. Some small religious groups that met in private homes were forced to move to new locations.

On June 30, 2004, the Parliament voted to accept recommendations made by the Ad Hoc Commission on Genocide Ideology; the commission was critical of a number of churches, their activities, and their leaders. The commission's report specifically targeted Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, a number of Pentecostal churches, and several Catholic priests. One example of such criticism was of a Catholic priest accused of promoting genocide ideology because he created an association of micro-credit borrowers, whose members all belonged to the same ethnic group. In another instance, several churches were accused of inciting their members to disobey government policies such as gacaca (a community-based model of conflict resolution) and night patrols. In addition, churches were criticized for allowing Hutu and Tutsi to sit separately during prayers. The commission recommended that the Government intervene in internal church politics to resolve leadership conflicts, that an association/prayer group called Abahamya B'izuka ("those who proselytize about Resurrection") should be abolished, and that the Government should counsel churches about which activities were acceptable. It also called on Parliament to adopt a special law to govern the functioning of all churches; however, there was no specific legal process to abolish the groups named by the parliamentary commission at the end of the period covered by this report.

The law does not require a person who wants to get married at a ceremony presided over by a government official to put his or her hand on the national flag, but this practice is enforced throughout the country. Jehovah's Witnesses have a very difficult time finding places to marry without this patriotic ceremony, to which they object on religious grounds. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that members of their faith have been beaten and imprisoned due to their refusal to place their hands on the flag.

According to church officials, in 4 of the country's 12 provinces, 39 children of Jehovah's Witnesses were expelled from secondary schools between April and June 2004 for refusing to salute the national flag or to sing the national anthem. Three children were also expelled from school in March in Kirambo District, Cyangugu Province. Church officials have raised the issue with national authorities, but most of the children remained expelled from public schools at the end of the period covered by this report and were compelled to join private schools to avoid compromising their religious beliefs. In addition, local authorities in Kibungo, Ruhengeri, Gitarama, and Butare provinces supported such expulsions.

In February 2002, government authorities forbade Pasteur Bizimungu, a former president of the country who organized a political party banned by the Government in 2001, from attending public church services; authorities charged that Bizimungu's presence would be "divisive." The Government's action reportedly was politically motivated. In April 2002, Pasteur Bizimungu was arrested on charges of illegal political activity. He was later charged with threatening state security and with financial improprieties. The trial against him began in March 2004, and he was found guilty and sentenced to 15 years in prison in June 2004. On April 20, 2005, the High Court of the Republic ruled that it did not have the legal competency to receive his appeal and sent the case to the Supreme Court, where it was scheduled to be heard on July 21, 2005.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were numerous reports that members of Jehovah's Witnesses were detained or arrested for refusing to participate in night security patrols. Between January

1 and June 30, 2005, 60 Jehovah's Witnesses have been imprisoned or detained on alleged security grounds, a dozen of whom faced severe beatings while in detention. Detentions ranged from 1 day to 1 month in length, and although only 10 persons remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report, the Government continued to make new arrests.

On February 18, 2005, the Minister of Local Government, Protais Musoni, issued a written directive to all 12 prefects (provincial governors) ordering them to halt the construction of Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Halls. In April, Musoni met with the church leaders and agreed to write another letter to all prefects, recommending that they meet with local Jehovah Witnesses leaders to discuss church policies. Church officials reported that as a result of subsequent meetings with local officials, construction work had resumed on Kingdom Halls at the end of the reporting period. Church officials hoped the increased dialogue with the Government would ease tensions, but they also feared continued detentions.

Nine Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested in April 2005, and charged with rebellion. Three from Butaro District, Ruhengeri Province, have been tried. One was acquitted and two were found guilty and given sentences of 1 year, and 8 months, respectively, in addition to being required to pay court costs. On May 25, they appealed to the Provincial Appeal Court for Ruhengeri, which on June 24 overturned the verdict of the District court and ordered both men to be released. The remaining six, arrested in Nyamata District, Kigali Ngali Province, were convicted on charges of rebellion on March 18, 2005, sentenced to 3 months' imprisonment and payment of court costs, and released on May 30, a few weeks short of completing their sentences. According to the church leaders, the only evidence presented against the church members was their refusal to participate in compulsory, government-organized night patrols. The courts found that there is no law requiring participation in night patrols and that the prosecutor had wrongly applied a law that requires some form of "community work."

On March 25, 2005, 10 Jehovah's Witnesses from Matyazo sector were detained at Huye district in Butare province. The defendants were released on April 28 without trial or formal charges. In May, a local government sector coordinator, commonly known as a "counselor," went door-to-door warning people in Butare not to associate with the church, according to church leaders.

During the period covered by this report, Jehovah's Witnesses members from 5 of the 12 provinces were arrested on charges of "disobeying government emergency security policy," specifically, refusing to participate in night patrols. In three of the five provinces, local authorities reportedly beat the detained Jehovah's Witnesses. These included six that were arrested at Nyamata in Kigali Ngali Province on March 4, 2005, two that were arrested in Kigarama, Kibungo Province in March, and another arrested at Kaduha, Gikongoro Province, on May 1.

In 2004, two Jehovah's Witnesses' circuit overseers (church leaders) who travel to various congregations for ministerial activity were arrested. Police arrested Tharcisse Muhire in April 2004, at Ntongwe in Gitarama Province, on charges of "inciting school children to disrespect national symbols, and to oppose government policy on security." He reportedly was threatened and forced to walk for 4 hours under armed guard to the military prison in Nyamabuye-Gitarama; however, he was released in May, 2004. The other circuit overseer was arrested on June 20, 2004, and released the next day after a Jehovah's Witness delegation met with the authorities.

In January 2004, Pentecostal Pastor Majyambere was arrested in Kigali on charges of "preaching rebellion." On March 27, 2005, he was found guilty and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment. He was released on March 31 after having completed his full sentence. On May 8, 2005, 16 members of his congregation, including 5 women, were arrested and beaten at Kibagabaga, Kacyiru District, Kigali City. In March 2005, Pentecostal Pastors Stanislas Ntawurikura and Denis Serugendo were arrested in Kibungo Province on charges of rebellion. The 16 church members and both pastors remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

The eight members of a dissident Catholic congregation in Gisenyi Province accused of "subversive activities" and arrested in February 2004 remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

At the end of the period covered by this report, Pentecostal church leaders arrested in 2003 during a prayer service on Mt. Kigali for meeting at night and for practicing their religion outside their church (both considered to be threats to security) were still in detention.

No one has been held accountable for the 2002 attack on a Pentecostal group that had split off in the Gikondo district of Kigali; the perpetrators reportedly included Local Defense Forces and the mayor of the sector. The leaders of the church were

arrested in February 2003 and remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

Some religious leaders were perpetrators of violence and discrimination, and several members of the clergy of various faiths have faced charges of genocide in the courts, in the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha, Tanzania, and in foreign courts, notably in Belgium. In 2003, the ICTR concluded the trials of Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and his son, Gerald Ntakirutimana. Both were found guilty of genocide; their appeals were dismissed in December 2004. Of the 16 detainees awaiting trial at the ICTR in May 2005, 3 were religious leaders during the 1994 Genocide: Hormisdas Nsengimana, Rector of Christ-Roi College; Emmanuel Rukundo, a military chaplain; and Athanase Seromba, a Catholic priest.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There are numerous associations and interfaith groups, such as the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Protestant Council of Rwanda, that contribute to understanding between the various religions.

The Interfaith Commission for Rwanda (launched by Muslims, Protestant and evangelical churches in 2003) promotes unity and reconciliation by supporting activities such as aid programs in 10 of the country's 12 provinces (all except Gikongoro and Kibungo) aimed at reconciling genocide survivors, released genocide prisoners, and genocide detainees' families. Mufti Saleh Habimana, the leader of Rwanda's Muslim community, participated in various international interfaith fora, including the World Conference of the Parliament of the World's Religions (held in Taiwan in November 2004), and the First World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace (held in Brussels in January 2005), organized by the French organization "Homme de Parole."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials maintain regular contact with leaders and members of religious communities.

Embassy officers held numerous meetings with members of the Catholic and Anglican Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, leaders of the Muslim community, and small, evangelical Protestant groups to promote interfaith dialogue and discuss religious freedom. In addition, Embassy officers regularly met with local and international NGOs involved in peace, justice, and reconciliation efforts that focus on religious tolerance and freedom.

SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 386 square miles, and its population is approximately 181,000. The population is predominantly Roman Catholic. No official statistics are

available; however, it is estimated that approximately 80 percent of the population is Catholic, 15 percent is Protestant, 3 percent is Muslim, and 2 percent is atheist. Protestantism has grown considerably in recent years due to the success of Protestant missionaries in the country. The number of Muslims has increased due to an influx of illegal immigrants from Nigeria and Cameroon, but no statistics are available. Traditional indigenous religions do not exist. Although witchcraft is practiced, it is not considered to be a religion. Practitioners of witchcraft most often are members of a major religion.

There are Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the country. Missionaries of other religions also operate 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. There is no state religion.

Religious organizations are required to register with the Government; however, there were no reports that any groups were denied registration or that the activities of unregistered groups were restricted.

There are no restrictions on the activities of foreign clergy, and missionaries in the country operate unhindered.

The Government celebrates some holy days as national holidays. These include Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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. Embassy, based in Libreville, Gabon, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall policy to promote human rights. In addition, Embassy officials regularly meet with the country's Catholic bishop, Protestant church leaders, and nongovernmental organizations. Following the 2003 coup attempt, the U.S. Government also encouraged a formal process of national reconciliation that included leaders of various religious organizations. The final result of the process was the "National Forum" held in July 2004 that included the participation of most secular and religious leaders in Sao Tome, and was chaired by an ordained Protestant minister.

SENEGAL

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 76,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at 10 million. According to current government demographic data, Islam is the predominant religion, practiced by approximately 94 percent of the country's population. Most citizens practice a syncretic form of Islam, combining formal religious practices with traditional cultural beliefs and values. There also is an active Christian community (4 percent of the population) that includes Roman Catholics, Protestant denominations, and syncretic Christian-animist groups. The remainder of the population, an estimated 2 percent, practices exclusively traditional indigenous religions or no religion.

The country is ethnically and religiously diverse. Although there is significant integration of all groups, there are geographic concentrations of some religious groups. The Christian minority is concentrated in the western and southern regions, while groups that practice traditional religions are mainly in the eastern and southern regions. Immigrants practice the same faiths as native-born citizens.

A wide variety of foreign missionary groups operate, including Catholics, Protestants, independent missionaries, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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; the Constitution specifically defines the country as a secular state and provides for the free practice of religious beliefs, provided that public order is maintained.

The importance of religion in the country often resulted in the Government giving direct financial and material assistance to religious organizations. There is no official system of distribution for these grants which are often provided to assist religious groups to maintain or rehabilitate their places of worship or undertake special events. All religions have access to these funds. During the period covered by this report, the Government provided funds and technical assistance to rehabilitate churches throughout the country, including Dakar's national cathedral. The Government provides security personnel and enhanced public services to support national religious pilgrimages, both Christian and Muslim.

The Government observes a number of Muslim and Christian holy days. Muslim holy days observed are Tabaski, Tamkharit, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, and Korite. Christian holy days observed are Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day and Christmas.

Religious organizations are independent of the Government and administer their affairs without government interference; however, the civil and commercial code requires any group, religious or otherwise, to register with the Minister of the Interior to acquire legal status as an association. Registration enables an association to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, and receive financial contributions from private sources. Registered religious groups, including all registered nonprofit organizations, are exempt from many forms of taxation. Registration generally is granted and the Minister of Interior must have a legal basis for refusing registration.

Missionaries, like other long-term visitors, must obtain residence visas from the Ministry of Interior. Christian and Islamic groups often establish a presence as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Religious NGOs obtain permission to operate from the Minister of the Family, Social Action, and National Solidarity. There were no reports that the Government refused visas or permission to operate to any group. Religious NGOs are very active in providing social services and administering economic development assistance programs.

In 2002, the Government passed a law that allows public schools to offer 2 hours of religious education, both Islamic and Christian, per school week through a pilot program. Religious teaching is an optional part of the curriculum, and students are not required to participate. Privately owned schools are free to provide religious education. The Ministry of Education provides funds to schools operated by religious institutions that meet national education standards. Christian schools, which have

a long and successful experience in education, receive the largest share of this government funding. The majority of students attending Christian schools are Muslims.

The Government encourages and assists Muslim participation in the Hajj every year. It also provides similar assistance for an annual Catholic pilgrimage to the Vatican. After Pope John Paul II's death, the Government sent a delegation to attend his funeral that included senior government officials and leaders in the Christian community.

While there is no specific government-sponsored institution to promote interfaith dialogue, the Government generally seeks to promote religious harmony by maintaining relations with the larger religious groups. Senior government officials regularly consult with religious leaders, and the Government generally is represented at all major religious festivals or events. In April 2005, the Government held a summit to prepare for a conference on Islamic-Christian cooperation and harmony at which President Wade, Prime Minister Macky Sall, and other government leaders were present, along with delegations from several foreign countries. During the summit, President Wade spoke about the peaceful coexistence of religions in the country, a source of national pride. A larger Islamic-Christian summit was scheduled for December 2007. During the period covered by this report, the Government's High Commissioner for Human Rights addressed the U.N. Human Rights Commission about the importance of religious tolerance.

The Government actively promoted religious tolerance among its citizens. When anonymous threats were made against members of the Christian clergy in early 2004, the Government quickly denounced the threats and assured the protection of Christian leaders.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Majority and minority religious leaders conduct their activities and speak out on social and political issues, such as political violence and HIV/AIDS, without fear of government sanction. The Government monitors foreign missionary groups and religious NGOs to ensure that their activities coincide with their stated objectives.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Religion plays an important role in the lives of most citizens, and society generally is very open to and tolerant of different religious faiths. The country has a long tradition of amicable and tolerant coexistence between the Muslim majority and Christian, traditional indigenous, and other religious minorities. Interfaith marriage is relatively common. Within certain families, other religious faiths, such as Christianity or a traditional indigenous religion, are practiced alongside Islam. There are a number of interfaith events throughout the year that celebrate the important role of religion in everyday life.

Islamic communities generally are organized around one of several brotherhoods, headed by a Khalif, who is a direct descendant of the group's founder. The two largest and most prominent of these brotherhoods are the Tidjanes, based in the city of Tivouane, and the Mourides, based in the city of Touba. At times there have been disputes within the different brotherhoods over questions of succession or general authority; however, relations generally have been peaceful and cooperative. In recent years, a National Committee to Coordinate Sightings of the Moon, and hence the designation of Muslim holy days, has been formed at the suggestion of the Government and effectively increased cooperation among the Islamic subgroups.

While the brotherhoods are not involved directly in politics or government affairs, these groups exert considerable influence in society and maintain a dialogue with political leaders. Close association with a brotherhood, as with any influential community leader, religious or secular, may afford certain political and economic protections and advantages that are not conferred by law.

Christian and Islamic leaders long have maintained a public dialogue with one another. During the period covered by this report, the death of a retired Cardinal who had championed interfaith harmony generated nationwide reflection and public discourse among Muslim and Christian communities on the importance of religious tolerance.

Unlike in the past, there were no cases of interfaith violence during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and maintains relations with all major religious groups, including the Mouride, Tidiane, Lyssane, and Qadriyya Islamic brotherhoods and Christian groups. During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and other Embassy staff met with religious leaders or their representatives, many of whom had never met an American diplomat, to discuss social and political issues and demonstrate American interest in forging positive relationships with Islamic communities. The Embassy maintains contacts with several faith-based NGOs, foreign missionary groups, and human rights organizations and activists to monitor issues of religious freedom. The Ambassador or his representative regularly attends major annual religious festivals or gatherings to promote an open dialogue with various religious groups.

The U.S. Embassy has an active program of presenting information about religious diversity and tolerance in the United States. The Embassy has translated, published, and distributed the "Muslim Life in America" brochure in the two major national languages (Wolof and Pulaar). The Embassy routinely released to the local press, posted on its website and published through a monthly magazine information on Islam in the United States, including statements from the President and the Secretary of State celebrating Ramadan and other Muslim holidays. During the period covered by this report, for example, the Embassy publicized the 10,000 Americans who participated in the most recent Hajj. In August 2004, the Embassy sent five English teachers on a program to the U.S. during which participants visited Muslim communities in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania to learn about interfaith relations. The Ambassador donated several hundred Arabic language books to the Al-Azhar Institute of Islamic Studies. In addition, the Embassy made many smaller donations to Islamic institutes, schools, and libraries.

The Embassy continued during Ramadan to host Iftars and deliver traditional gifts to religious leaders in recognition of their daily fasts. The media reported that the Embassy preceded its public programs with traditional Ramadan greetings. Similarly, President Bush's Ramadan message and Iftar reception were widely covered in all media.

SEYCHELLES

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

There was no change in the status of 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 444 square miles, and its population is approximately 82,500. According to a 2005 estimate by the Ministry of Information Technology and Communication, about 82 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 6 percent is Anglican. There are other Christian churches, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, the Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assembly, the Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hinduism, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith also are practiced.

A few foreign missionary groups practice in the country, including the Missionaries of Charity, which is a Roman Catholic organization.

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.

The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist churches, Islamic mosques, and Baha'i local spiritual assembly have individual acts of incorporation. Other churches that are not corporate bodies are registered as associations with the Registrar General and are entitled to tax-free privileges, similar to a charity. All religious organizations must register to be entitled to tax-free privileges. If an organization does not want tax-free privileges, it is not required to register.

The Government tends to remain uninvolved with religious matters, but it provides program time to different religious organizations on the national radio broadcasting service. On Sundays, a radio broadcast of a Catholic Mass alternates each week with a broadcast of an Anglican service. The Islam and Hindu faiths are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Friday, and the Baha'i and Seventh-day Adventist faiths are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Saturday.

Government employees of all faiths can request paid leave on any of their holy days, and such leave generally is granted. The majority of government ministers are Catholic.

The Roman Catholic holy days of Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, and Christmas are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government did not demonstrate favoritism toward one religion over another; however, in 2003 the Government gave a grant of \$400,000 (2 million Seychelles rupees) to the Anglican Church to construct a new cathedral, and \$400,000 to the Roman Catholic Church. In 2004, the Baie Sainte Anne Church, a Catholic church, was awarded \$200,000 (1 million Seychelles rupees) for major renovation works.

According to the Government, a portion of the national budget is periodically allocated to provide assistance to faiths that request financial support at the beginning of each year. In the past, Baha'i and Hindu groups have benefited from these grants, which are awarded on a case-by-case basis and based on the availability of budgeted funds.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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

SIERRA LEONE

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; however, there were two known incidents of religious intolerance during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 29,925 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.9 million. Reliable data on the exact numbers of those who practice major religions are not available; however, most sources estimate that the population is 60 percent Muslim, 30 percent Christian, and 10 percent practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. There is no information concerning the number of atheists in the country.

Many syncretistic practices reportedly exist, and many citizens practice a mixture of Islam and traditional indigenous religions or Christianity and traditional indigenous religions.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians were located in the south; however, the 11-year civil war, which officially was declared over in 2002, resulted in movement by major segments of the population.

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.

Religious holidays celebrated as national holidays include the Muslim Eid al-Adha, the Prophet Muhammed's birthday, and Eid al-Fitr holidays, and the Christian Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas holidays.

The Government has no requirements for recognizing, registering, or regulating religious groups.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. Students are allowed to choose whether to attend Muslim or Christian oriented classes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

On January 1, 2005, the Immigration Department revised its annual registration fees for businessmen, teachers, missionaries, and other groups of foreign residents. Fees for missionaries increased from approximately \$3 (10,000 leones) to approximately \$70 (200,000 leones). Some foreign missionaries complained that the increased immigration registration fee was a restriction.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, and interfaith marriage is common. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC), composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, plays a vital role in civil society and actively participates in efforts to further the peace process in the country and the subregion. Christian and Muslim leaders worked together with the National Accountability Group and the Anti-Corruption Commission to address the problem of corruption in society.

On May 19, an altercation between an Anglican schoolteacher from St. Philip's Primary School and a Muslim woman began when the teacher and her students allegedly blocked the way of the Muslim woman who was trying to cross a street in East Freetown. The students reportedly taunted the Muslim woman, calling her a

“debul” (a masked devil). When the woman started to fight the students, the students allegedly tore the woman’s clothes and her veil. Approximately 20 Muslim men rescued the woman and threw objects at the Catholic school. Although police came to the scene, they made no arrests. On May 20, approximately 100 persons, mostly youths and allegedly carrying sticks, knives, and copies of the Qur’an, gathered outside St. Philip’s Church to protest the previous day’s incident. The group threw objects at the church and broke most of the building’s windows. After the incident, church leaders cancelled Sunday religious services and closed the school. The IRC hosted a series of meetings between the two groups to discuss the issue. Church services resumed on May 29, and the school re-opened on June 2. The Inspector General of Police settled the dispute between the schoolteacher and the Muslim woman, and both signed an agreement that the matter had been resolved and no future action would be taken.

On April 21, a public holiday for the Prophet’s Birthday, a group of Muslims in Rokupr burned the igbala (hut or shrine) where the local hunting society stored its traditional hunting masks so that the group could not stage its traditional parade. A local newspaper reported and police confirmed that the Muslims burned the masks because they believed that the pagan tradition was a desecration of the Prophet’s birthday. Police arrested several persons after the incident and were still investigating the case at the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain frequent contact with the IRC and its individual members. In November 2004, the U.S. Ambassador hosted an Iftar for Muslims and Islamic leaders.

SOMALIA

There is no constitution and no legal provision for the protection of religious freedom; there were limits on religious freedom.

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

There is strong societal pressure to respect Islamic traditions, especially in enclaves still influenced but not controlled by radical Islamists in the Lower Juba region.

The U.S. Government does not maintain an official presence in the country. The lack of diplomatic representation has limited the ability of the U.S. Government to take action to promote religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 246,200 square miles, and its population is approximately 8.3 million; however, population figures are difficult to estimate due to the instability of the country. Citizens overwhelmingly are Sunni Muslim. There also is a small, extremely low-profile Christian community, in addition to small numbers of followers of other religions. The number of adherents to strains of conservative Islam is growing. The number of Islamic schools funded by religiously conservative sources continued to grow.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

There is no constitution and no legal provision for the protection of religious freedom. There were limits on religious freedom imposed by self-appointed officials and authorities and through societal attitude.

There is no central government. A Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was created in October 2004 following the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference in Mbagathi, Kenya; however, that government remained in exile in Kenya through the end of 2004. The TFG adopted a Transitional Federal Charter in 2004 but could not implement it while in exile. Members of the TFG returned to Somalia in June 2005, but deep divisions have split the transitional institutions over issues related to the Transitional Federal Charter, the seat of the TFG, and the nature of possible involvement in Somalia by neighboring countries.

The charter establishes Islam as the national religion. Several sheikhs have announced that the TFG must reflect a commitment to Islamic governance and morals. Some local administrations, including the self-declared “Republic of Somaliland” and the semi-autonomous region of Puntland, have made Islam the official religion in their regions; however, regional authorities generally do not espouse rhetoric against non-Muslims.

The judiciary in most regions relies on some combination of Shari’a, traditional and customary law (Xeer), and the Penal Code of the pre-1991 Siad Barre government. Shari’a courts throughout Mogadishu are asserting their authority, attracting support from businessmen, and sometimes, at least superficially, working across clan lines (clan membership forms the primary basis for identity and loyalty).

In Somaliland, religious schools and places of worship are required to obtain the Ministry of Religion’s permission to operate. The Ministry must approve entry visas for religious groups, and certain unspecified doctrines are prohibited. Religious schools and places of worship in Puntland must receive permission to operate from the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Proselytizing for any religion except Islam is prohibited in Puntland and Somaliland and effectively blocked by informal social consensus elsewhere in the country. Although Christian-based international relief organizations generally operate without interference, provided that they refrain from proselytizing, there were several attacks against non-Muslim international relief workers in 2003.

In April 2004, thousands of citizens marched through the streets in Mogadishu and in the southern coastal town of Merca to protest what they believed was an attempt by aid agencies to spread Christianity. Muslim scholars organized the protest following reports that school children received gifts with Christian emblems alongside charitable aid. The protesters set ablaze hundreds of cartons containing goods, some marked only as gifts from the “Swiss Church.” The protesters warned the aid agencies against using relief items to evangelize.

In March 2004, Mohamed Omar Habeb, also known as Mohamed Dheere, who controls the Middle Shabelle region, countered the general Islamic trend in Somalia by banning women from wearing veils. He subsequently jailed at least 17 women who had violated his decree, claiming that veils made it difficult to distinguish women from men who might be concealing weapons. Habeb was quoted as saying that he was committed to curbing violent attacks by extremists, but he later released the women following an outcry from many Islamic scholars throughout the country, particularly in Mogadishu.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Article 6.3 of the Puntland Charter prohibits torture “unless sentenced by Islamic Shari’a Courts in accordance with Islamic Shari’a law.” Islamic courts continue to operate throughout the country in the absence of a national judicial system operated by a central government.

In January 2005, a violent Jihadi group, not known to be connected to any other Islamist formation or any political factions, desecrated the Italian colonial cemetery in Mogadishu. While the excavation of the cemetery served a political and economic function, the act had religious overtones, as those in control of the site stated that they planned to build a mosque there and erected a makeshift sheet-metal shelter as a first step. The group, although espousing Islamist rhetoric, was widely condemned by mainstream Sufi Muslims and some Salafist groups.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees during the period covered by this report.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

In late 2003 and in 2004, there were several fatal attacks against non-Muslim international relief and charity workers throughout the country and in the region of Somaliland. In addition, recent threats have targeted non-Muslim Westerners in the country, including in Somaliland. During the period covered by this report, there were several targeted killings, apparently politically motivated, by unknown assailants in Somaliland and in Mogadishu. Although many of these killings were attrib-

uted to members of violent political Islamic groups, victims did not appear to be chosen on overtly religious criteria.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Non-Sunni Muslims often were viewed with suspicion by members of the Sunni majority.

The BBC reported that in March 2005, local Muslim cleric Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, an influential figure in the Association of Islamic Courts and former leader of Al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) called for a violent jihad against any peacekeeping force that accompanied the TFG's return to the country.

There is strong societal pressure to respect Islamic traditions, especially in enclaves still influenced but not controlled by Islamists espousing violent political agendas in Doble, Ras Kaambooni, and Kolbiyow in the Lower Juba region. Organized Islamic groups whose goal is the establishment of an Islamic state include Al-Islah, a generally nonviolent political movement that operates primarily in Mogadishu, and AIAI, which some still consider the country's largest militant Islamic organization despite evidence that it no longer exists as a unitary or coherent organization. AIAI clearly has committed terrorist acts in the past and remains on the U.S. Government's Terrorist Exclusion List. Although individuals continue to claim to be adherents to its precepts, in recent years AIAI has become factionalized and its membership decentralized. Unlike AIAI, Al-Islah is a generally nonviolent and modernizing Islamic movement that emphasizes the reformation and revival of Islam to meet the challenges of the modern world.

There are a significant number of externally funded Qur'anic schools throughout the country. These schools provide inexpensive basic education but may require young girls to wear veils and participate in other conservative Islamic practices not generally found in the local culture. Mogadishu University, the University of East Africa in Bosasso, Puntland, and many secondary schools in Mogadishu are externally funded and administered through organizations affiliated with the conservative Islamic organization Al-Islah.

Christians, as well as other non-Muslims who proclaim their religion, face occasional societal harassment.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government does not maintain a diplomatic presence, and travel to the country by U.S. Government officials is seriously proscribed. There is no functioning central government to whom the U.S. Government might make known its views on religious freedom; regional and self-proclaimed authorities are unresponsive due to the lack of U.S. diplomatic recognition of or representation to them. These restraints have limited the U.S. Government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom in the country.

SOUTH AFRICA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 470,693 square miles, and its population is approximately 44.8 million. According to figures on religious demography from the 2001 census, approximately 80 percent of the population belongs to the Christian faith, and 4 percent to other religions, including Hinduism (1.2 percent), Islam (1.5 percent), Judaism (0.2 percent), and traditional African beliefs (0.3 percent). Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated that it belongs to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation.

The African Independent Churches are the largest group of Christian churches. There are 4,000 or more of them, with a total membership of more than 10 million.

Although these churches originally were founded as breakaways from various mission churches (the so-called Ethiopian churches), the African Independent Churches now consist mostly of Zionist or Apostolic churches and also include some Pentecostal branches. The Zionist Christian Church is the largest African Independent Church with 11.1 percent of the population. The African Independent Churches attract persons in rural and urban areas.

Other Christian churches include the Dutch Reformed family of churches, which consist of approximately 6.7 percent of the population; and the Roman Catholic Church, which consists of approximately 7.1 percent. Protestant denominations include the Methodist (6.8 percent), Anglican (3.8 percent), Lutheran (2.5 percent), Presbyterian (1.9 percent), Baptist (1.5 percent), and Congregational (1.1 percent) churches. The largest traditional Pentecostal churches are the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. A number of charismatic churches have been established in recent years. Their subsidiary churches, together with those of the Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria, are grouped in the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. The Greek Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist churches also are active.

Approximately 15 percent of the population claims no affiliation with any formal religious organization. It is believed that many of these persons adhere to traditional indigenous religions. A common feature of the traditional indigenous religions is the importance of ancestors, who are regarded as part of the community and as indispensable links with the spirit world and the powers that control everyday affairs. Followers of traditional indigenous religions believe that certain practitioners may manipulate the power of the spirits using herbs, therapeutic techniques, or supernatural powers. Some practitioners are considered masters of "black magic" and engender fear. Many persons combine Christian and traditional indigenous religious practices.

According to the latest available statistics from the 2001 census, an estimated 80 percent of Black Africans, who constitute the majority of the population, are Christian. Approximately 87 percent of whites are Christian and almost 1.4 percent Jewish. Nearly half (47.3 percent) of Indians are Hindu, 49 percent are either Muslim (24.6 percent) or Christian (24.4 percent), and 3.7 percent fall into other categories. The majority of Muslims is Indian or belongs to the multi-ethnic community in the Western Cape.

A number of Christian organizations, including the Salvation Army, Promise Keepers, Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), operate in the country doing missionary work, giving aid, and providing training. The Muslim World League also is active, as is the Zionist International Federation.

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 prohibits the Government from unfairly discriminating directly or indirectly against anyone based on religion, and it states that persons belonging to a religious community may not be denied the right to practice their religion and to form, join, and maintain religious associations with other members of that community. Cases of discrimination against a person on the grounds of religious freedom may be taken to the Constitutional Court.

While Christianity is the dominant religion, the law does not recognize a state religion. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths, including various Christian denominations, Islam, and Judaism.

Only Christian holy days, such as Christmas and Good Friday, are recognized as national religious holidays; however, members of other religious groups are allowed to celebrate their religious holidays without government interference. The Government is in the process of reviewing the public holiday system to determine whether holy days of other religions should be included.

The Government allows, but does not require, "religion education" in public schools; however, "religious instruction," or the advocating of tenets of a particular faith, is not permitted in public schools.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered.

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 United States 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There are many ecumenical contacts among the various churches. The largest of these is the South African Council of Churches (SACC), which represents the Methodist Church, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), various Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, and the Congregational Church, among others. The major traditional indigenous religions, most of the Afrikaans-language churches, and the Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not members of the SACC and usually have their own coordinating and liaison bodies. The Roman Catholic Church's relationship with other churches is becoming more open, and it works closely with other churches on the socio-political front. For example, a coalition of religious and civil society leaders, including the South African Council of Churches and the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, released a statement on April 7, 2005 claiming that recent elections in Zimbabwe had fallen short of Southern African Development Community standards, and criticizing the South African Government Observer Mission's assessment for being too positive.

There were reports of killings allegedly linked to the continued targeting of purported practitioners of witchcraft, particularly in Limpopo Province. In April 2005, a man from Dan Village in Ritavi, Limpopo, killed his grandmother with an axe after accusing her of bewitching him. In February, a mob of approximately 90 youths set alight 39 houses in 4 villages in Limpopo, accusing the occupants of being witches. Thirteen suspected ringleaders have been charged and are due to appear in court in August.

In February, six men were convicted in the 1999 murder of a 65-year-old woman, accused by them of being a witch. Unlike during the previous reporting period, there were no reports of killings linked to the practice of Satanism. The Government does not keep records on cases of reported witchcraft and satanic killings. These cases are investigated and prosecuted as homicide by law enforcement officials.

Several Muslim organizations and groups hold views and opinions that support Islamic fundamentalism, but concerns about Islamic extremism, fueled by past incidents of violence by the radical organization People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) subsided. PAGAD is an Islamic-oriented organization opposed to crime, gangsterism, and drugs, but it has been known for violent vigilantism and acts of terrorism. During the period covered by this report, however, PAGAD maintained a small and much less visible presence in the Cape Town Muslim community. The police have not attributed any terrorist acts to PAGAD since the 2002 bombing of the Bishops Lavis offices of the Serious Crimes Unit in the Western Cape. No arrests have been made in that case, but the South African Police Services is still investigating a possible link with PAGAD.

Qibla, an offshoot of Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalism, avows a political jihad. It is an ally of PAGAD and has an anti-U.S. and anti-Israel stance. Qibla's Shi'ite radicalism sharply contrasts with the generally conservative and apolitical Muslim community (mainly Sunni) in Cape Town. No Qibla activities were reported in the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Consul General in Cape Town delivered two talks on Islam in America, one to the Interfaith Initiative in Cape Town, and the second on the Muslim-oriented radio program, "Voice of the Cape."

The Consul General also participated in an Embassy Pretoria program on “Muslims in America” at the Africa Dialogue lecture series hosted by the Center for International Political Studies at the University of Pretoria. Embassy Pretoria also reached out to faith-based organizations in Gauteng province, including the Rasooli Community Center.

The Consulate General in Durban donated scholastic books to a Muslim high school. Two Fulbright scholars from South Africa are currently doing Islamic Studies research in the U.S. In May 2005, representatives from the Johannesburg Consulate visited two Muslim radio stations, a Muslim newspaper, and NGOs in Lenasia, a predominantly Muslim area. In September 2004, journalists from “The Indicator” and “Radio Islam” attended a pre-election digital videoconference.

SUDAN

Both the Constitution of 1998 and the draft of a new constitution to replace it provide for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government continued to place many restrictions on non-Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, and Muslims from tribes or sects not affiliated with the ruling party. The Government that came to power through a coup in 1989 had as a goal the Islamization of the society, and it has treated Islam as the state religion, declaring that it must inspire the country’s laws, institutions, and policies. Sudan has suffered many years of civil war. A major step towards peace was achieved with the signing, on January 9, 2005, of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) covering the north-south conflict. The CPA calls for the adoption of a new constitution and installation of an interim government on July 9, 2005.

The issue of respect for religious freedom was a topic of discussion throughout the first half of 2005 as the peace process progressed, and a new constitution was drafted that included specific religious freedom guarantees based on a series of negotiated protocols. Under the proposed constitution, a distinction is made between the north and the south. The new constitution states that legislation having effect only in the north “shall have as its source . . . Shari’a and the consensus of the people.” Legislation applicable to the south of Sudan shall have as its source “popular consensus, the values and the customs of the people of Sudan, including their traditions and religious beliefs.” This is a change from the previous policy that used Shari’a as a source of legislation throughout the country.

There was no significant change in practice concerning the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to discriminate against non-Muslims, non-Arab Muslims, and those Muslims not from tribes or sects affiliated with the ruling party, particularly in terms of government job allocations. Non-Muslims were also discriminated against in the issuance of building permits for houses of worship. There were reports that security forces harassed and at times threatened use of violence against persons on the basis of religious beliefs and activities, although it was sometimes unclear whether they were harassed for religious or political reasons.

Relations among religious groups improved somewhat during the period covered by the report.

There was increased dialogue among the various religious communities under the auspices of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), which describes itself as an independent nongovernmental organization (NGO), and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC). The SCC is composed of 12 Christian denominations, among them Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant groups. There were several efforts underway to promote peace and reconciliation. Some churches within the SCC were actively working toward peace and reconciliation by bringing together Muslims and Christians in workshops and seminars.

The U.S. Government continued to promote religious freedom and human rights in the country with the Government and the public throughout the period covered by this report. The U.S. Government made it clear to the Government that the problem of religious freedom is a serious impediment to improvement in the relationship between the two countries. High-level U.S. officials and U.S. Missions to international forums have consistently raised the issue of religious freedom with both the Government and the public. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Sudan a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 967,500 square miles, and its population is an estimated 40 million. The country is religiously mixed, although Muslims have dominated national government institutions since independence in 1956. Accurate figures are unavailable due to poor census data and decades of civil war, but estimates put the Muslim population at approximately 65 percent, including numerous Arab and non-Arab groups; Christians at approximately 10 percent; and traditionalists at 25 percent. Muslims predominate in the north, but there are sizable Christian communities in northern cities, principally in areas where there are large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

It is estimated that over the last 40 years, more than 4 million southerners have fled to the north to escape the war. Many citizens in the South adhere to either Christianity or traditional indigenous religions (animists); however, there are Muslim adherents as well, particularly along the historical dividing line between Arabs and Nilotic ethnic groups. There are reports that Christianity is growing rapidly in the south. There also is evidence that in the south many new converts to Christianity continue to adhere to elements of traditional indigenous practices. The self-reported number of adherents claimed by various groups may not be accurate and cannot be confirmed by census figures. Some Muslim groups claim that 80 to 85 percent of the population is Muslim. Catholics estimate their membership number at 5 to 7 million; Episcopalians estimate 4 to 5 million followers. There are small but long established populations of Greek Orthodox and Coptic Rite Christians, mainly around Khartoum and northern cities. The once 25,000-strong Greek community has been reduced to approximately 500. The Coptic community estimates its numbers in the past were between 400–500,000, most located throughout the north in Khartoum, North Darfur, and the Nuba Mountains, but many, mainly for economic reasons, have left the country or converted to Islam. There are also other Christian groups with smaller followings including Armenian Apostolic, Ethiopian Orthodox, Evangelical, Lutheran, Pentecostal and Presbyterian.

The Muslim population is almost entirely Sunni but is divided into many different groups. The most significant divisions occur along the lines of the Sufi brotherhoods. Two popular brotherhoods, the Ansar and the Khatmia, are associated with the opposition Umma and Democratic Unionist Parties respectively.

There is a rough correlation between religion, political affiliation and language. The National Congress Party (NC) and the Umma Party draw their support from Arabic speaking Muslims, the Democratic Union Party (DUP) includes Arabic speaking Muslims and Coptic Christians, while the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) finds support among Christian, English-speaking southerners.

The country's religious divergence is aggravated by the perception among southerners and non-Arab Muslims that they are marginalized by the Muslim government. Northern Arab Muslims have dominated political and economic structures since independence in 1956. Southerners began an armed struggle to protest religious, political, and economic discrimination even before that time.

In the three western Darfur states, the conflict has not been resolved between the Sudanese government and the Arab militias it supports (Janjaweed), and rebel groups with support from largely non-nomadic African Muslims. The conflict revolves around economic, political, and ethnic issues rather than religious differences.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Both the Constitution of 1998 and the draft of a new constitution provide for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government considered itself an Islamic government, and Islamization was an objective of the governing party. The Government continued to favor those that support the ruling party regardless of religion; however, Muslims from different traditions other than the ruling party, those not associated with the National Islamic Front (NIF), and non-Muslims faced discrimination when applying for government jobs.

Private schools may choose their own teachers, but all courses and curriculum, including those of private Christian schools, from pre-school through university, must follow the State-ordered model. Public schools may excuse non-Muslims from classes on Islam without providing those students a Christian teacher for that time. Muslim teachers go to private Christian schools to teach Islam to students there. The Government forbids the use of English as a language of instruction in the public schools, although it permits the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Religious organizations and churches are subject to the same restrictions that are placed on nonreligious corporations. Religious groups, like all other organizations, are supposed to be registered to be recognized or to assemble legally. However, registration reportedly is no longer necessary; and the churches, including the Catholic Church, have declared they are not nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and have declined to register. Registered religious groups are supposed to be exempt from most taxes, but the churches say they are still subject to taxes and import duties.

Applications to build mosques are generally granted; however, the process for filing applications to build churches is more difficult. The Guidance and Endowment Minister has reportedly revised the rules for issuing permits but, according to the SIRC, no permits have been issued under the new rules. The SIRC states that, in order to build a new church, permits have to be obtained at the state government level as well as the local government level. The Minister of Construction and Planning in each state must give permission, and local building permits obtained. Permits are denied to most non-Muslim religious groups, and local restrictions prohibit building places of worship in residential neighborhoods due to considerations of noise, numbers of worshippers, and other factors not applied equally to Christians and Muslims. The last formal permit for a Christian church was reportedly issued around 1975.

The Alien Voluntary Work Act regulates foreign groups coming to Sudan to evangelize. The SCC states that this act requires Christian groups to register with the government, but that it does not apply to Muslim groups.

The SCC, which represents 12 church denominations, faces internal organizational challenges. Three denominations, the Catholic Church, the African Inland Church, and the Sudan Pentecostal Church, suspended their memberships in the SCC in early 2005, reportedly due to disagreements on the operations of the SCC. During the civil war, a separate organization known as the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC) was established by the Catholic Church and seven other denominations in the south, in areas not controlled by the government. With the CPA in place, the intention is to merge the SCC and the NSCC.

Government officials have attended church services on Easter and Christmas to show solidarity and to address non-Muslims. The Orthodox Easter is an official government holiday, as are the traditional Muslim holy days.

The Government, through the Guidance and Endowment Ministry, ostensibly expresses a policy of religious tolerance. However, non-Muslims, as well as non-Arab Muslims and Muslims from tribes and traditions not affiliated with the ruling party continued to express concern that they are treated as second-class citizens and discriminated against in such religious matters as in the issuance of permits for the building of churches, and also with respect to jobs and other societal relations. They noted that a majority of Christians are from tribes in the south, not affiliated with the ruling party, which Christians claim puts them at a disadvantage.

In January 2005, the north-south peace process entered a new phase with the signing of a CPA. Under this agreement an interim government will govern the country for 6 years. In the south, a referendum will then be held to decide on unity or southern independence. Shari'a law and its application to non-Muslims in the capital was a contentious issue during the negotiations, but it and the other major issues underlying the north/south conflict have been largely resolved in the agreements. Shari'a generally will continue to be the basis of the national legal system as it applies in the north; national legislation applicable to the south will be based on "popular consensus, the values, and the customs of the people." In states or regions where a majority holds different religious or customary beliefs than those on which the legal system is based, the national laws may be amended to accord better with such beliefs. According to Shari'a principles, non-Muslims are not subject to prescribed penalties and therefore remitted penalties shall apply throughout the country. The courts may not exercise discretion to impose the harsher physical forms of Shari'a penalties on non-Muslims. The interim constitution is expected to be ratified in early July before the inauguration of the Government of National Unity (GONU) on July 9, 2005.

Under the CPA, a Special Commission on the Rights of Non-Muslims is to be created. The President of the new interim government will appoint the commission. The role of this commission has yet to be clearly defined. Some Muslim leaders have noted that there is no government commission on Muslim rights.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The problems non-Muslims have encountered in obtaining legal permits for new church construction continued. The SIRC reported that the Guidance and Endowment Ministry has new regulations for church construction permits. No permits had

been requested under the new regulations by the end of the period covered by this report.

While non-Muslims may convert to Islam, Shari'a makes apostasy (conversion from Islam to another religion) punishable by death. However, according to the SIRC, the Government has never taken a case of apostasy to court. In practice, authorities have subjected converts to intense scrutiny, ostracism, and intimidation, and encouraged them to leave the country. Social and familial pressure on converts from Islam is also reportedly common. There have also been reports that individuals from the Coptic community who convert to Islam face strong family and social pressure to renounce their decision.

Although the Constitution provides for religious freedom, the Government considered itself an Islamic government, and Islamization was an important objective of the governing party. Muslims may proselytize freely in government controlled areas, but non-Muslims were forbidden to proselytize. The Government continued to restrict the movement of some Christian missionaries.

Missionaries continued to operate in the south, running relief operations, medical clinics, and churches. Christian religious workers, including priests and teachers, like almost all visitors, experienced delays in getting visas. The visas are generally issued, sometimes after very lengthy delays or after the person can no longer travel. The Government controls the travel of all visitors to a number of conflict areas by refusing or delaying travel permit issuance.

Allegations of favoritism to the benefit of individuals who are pro-government are often made. Few non-Muslim, non-NIF affiliated or certain Muslim university graduates are able to find jobs commensurate with their training.

Some non-Muslim businessmen complained of petty harassment and discrimination in awarding of government contracts and trade licenses. There also were reports that some Muslims received preferential treatment regarding limited government services, such as access to medical care, and of preferential treatment in court cases involving Muslim against non-Muslim.

There were reports that some conversions were taking place in order to secure jobs and more equal treatment, especially as to food, housing, and social support services, which are largely available only through Islamic charities. There were also reports that some Christian humanitarian groups distributing food in Darfur were seeking to convert Muslims to Christianity.

The Government monitors some religious and quasi-religious Islamic groups, particularly those that oppose the Government through political platforms or violence against government-affiliated mosques. The group Ansar a Sunna, a small but vocal group that is reportedly funded by Saudi and Gulf sources, adheres to the teachings of the Saudi Wahhabi tradition of Islam. The Government restricts at least one Islamic group, Taqfir al-Hijra, which conducted violent acts against other Muslims.

Friday is the official day of rest and worship. Sunday is not recognized as the Sabbath for Christians, although employees are ostensibly given 2 hours before 10 a.m. to be used for religious purposes. In practice, for the great majority of non-Muslims, this time is not granted. Employers sometimes prevent Christians in the north from leaving work to worship, and many worship on Friday or Sunday evenings. Public schools are in session on Sunday, and Christian students are not excused from class or from taking exams on Sundays in these schools.

There is a shortage of space within Khartoum, and the cemeteries of Christians and Muslims are becoming more crowded. Christians may be buried in Muslim cemeteries if they are buried in the Muslim manner—without any cross or tomb and with the body positioned with the head facing Mecca.

The Khartoum State government continued the practice of razing the residences and temporary religious buildings constructed by Muslim and Christian IDPs alike, although at times the Government has razed the houses and spared makeshift places of worship. While planning continued for procedures to grant the IDPs legal title to land in other parts of the Khartoum area, the Government has justified its actions on the basis that the squatters do not own the land they are occupying and that they are preventing its rightful use by others.

Islamic family law applies to Muslims and not directly to those of other faiths, to whom religious or tribal laws apply. Certain Islamic legal provisions as interpreted and applied by the Government and many traditional practices discriminate against women. In accordance with Islamic law, a Muslim woman has the right to hold and dispose of her own property without interference, and women are ensured inheritance from their parents. However, a widow inherits one-eighth of her husband's estate; of the remaining seven-eighths, two-thirds goes to the sons and one-third to the daughters. It is much easier for men to initiate legal divorce proceedings than for women. A Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman because, under Islamic law, the wife is viewed as taking on the religion of her Muslim hus-

band at marriage. The children of such a marriage will be considered Muslim. The same is not true for a Muslim woman, who cannot legally marry a non-Muslim unless he converts to Islam. Since traditionalist marriages are not officially licensed or recognized by the State, this prohibition is usually neither observed nor enforced in areas of the south not under government control or among Nubans, most of whom are Muslims.

At times police on university campuses are strict about women following a dress code, but women are often seen in public wearing trousers or with their heads uncovered.

During the war, both opposing military forces occupied property owned by religious groups. In some parts of the south, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) reportedly has occupied churches, along with other buildings, to use during the conflict. In early May, press reports noted that a building in Rokon, in Southern Sudan, belonging to the Catholic Church had been handed over by the GOS military authorities to the Catholic Administration after 18 years. Under the peace agreement, churches in Rejaf East, Lirya and Kit are scheduled to be handed back.

The Government controls importation of any kind or quantity of publications, including religious publications, and local printings require the National Press Council's pre-approval of content. The Government also controls issuance of licenses and charges customs duties for printing presses.

Publication of newspapers was sometimes suspended, usually for political reasons, but at times also for religious reasons. In May 2005, the Khartoum newspaper *Al Wafaq* was shut down for several days and its editor-in-chief, Mohamed Taha, arrested after publication of an article that some readers interpreted as disrespectful of the Prophet Muhammed. Public protests were held when the article appeared and demonstrators called for the editor to be beheaded. The Government brought legal charges against the editor under Article 125 of the Criminal Law which states "whoever by any means publicly abuses or insults any of the religions, their rites or beliefs or sanctifications or seeks to excite feelings of contempt and disrespect against the believers thereof, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or with fine or with whipping which may not exceed forty lashes." The editor also faced charges under Article 29 of the Press Law that states that journalists are supposed to seek the truth, adhere to the code of ethics and the rule of law. The case is still in the courts.

The Qur'an pervades the educational curriculum and state-controlled television stations. Although government-controlled TV emphasizes prayers and Islamic programs, the SIRC is negotiating to increase the current 1-hour weekly program for Christians. In the south, there are reportedly three television stations featuring a number of Christian programs.

According to representatives of the Catholic Church, since the current Government took power in 1989, production and consumption of alcohol has been prohibited, and altar wine has not been allowed in any church service.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The north/south civil war caused an estimated 2 million deaths; approximately 4 million have been displaced internally as a result of fighting between the Government and insurgents in the south. In addition, approximately 2.4 million persons have been internally displaced within Darfur and 200,000 refugees have fled to Chad.

Security forces hold wide authority and monitored both churches and mosques. Security and police forces have not detained persons for practicing their religious beliefs and have not interfered with actual religious worship, which are not illegal activities. Christian women are still arrested for making and distributing homemade brews, but the Government claims the arrests are made only because alcohol is illegal and violates criminal law.

The Government officially exempts the southern states, which have large non-Muslim populations, from Hudood law—the part of Shari'a which permits physical punishments, including flogging, amputation, and stoning; however, all residents of Khartoum and the northern states, regardless of religion, are subject to Shari'a law, including the Hudood. In practice, this was rarely enforced on non-Muslims except in cases of illegal alcohol brewing. During the reporting period, there were a number of flogging sentences, but few were carried out. The SIRC reports that since 2000 there has been one case of amputation carried out due to repeated instances of theft. Fear of imposition of Shari'a on non-Muslims is one of the factors that fueled support for the civil war. The new Constitution will carry a special provision that non-Muslims in the capital are exempted from Hudood.

In May 2004, the Episcopal Church reported that armed police, without warning, forced the eviction of staff from a church guesthouse. The eviction order arose from

a dispute over land registered in the name of a former church bishop, dismissed from the church in 2003, who had posed as the Episcopal Archbishop and purported to sell the property. The Church filed a lawsuit to fight eviction and to reconcile the land ownership problem. The case was still in court at the end of the period covered by this report.

Forced Religious Conversion

Although some non-Muslims have converted under pressure to obtain or keep a job, for promotions and job advancement, or for other social services or benefits, there was no evidence of such forced conversions in the period covered by this report. However, some church leaders say that security forces in the south, in an attempt to garner votes for the referendum on north-south unity scheduled to be held in 6 years, are rewarding persons for converting to Islam and that the Government's military forces are forcing some conversions to Islam. Some Christians report pressure on their children in school, as the teachers and other parents ask them why they are not Muslims. Teachers and media characterize non-Muslims as non-believers. In the south, non-Muslim widows whose husbands were killed in the war receive no benefits, while Muslim widows may qualify for land and government benefits or for assistance from Islamic charities; some women are believed to have converted to be eligible for such private or governmental assistance. There were complaints from Muslims that some Western church organizations operating humanitarian programs in Darfur had coupled relief assistance with distributing bibles in an effort to convert Muslims to Christianity.

The Government operated camps for vagrant children called reformation camps. Police typically sent homeless children who had committed crimes to these camps, where they were detained for indefinite periods. All of the children in the camps, including non-Muslims, must study the Qur'an, and there was pressure on non-Muslims to convert to Islam.

Children who have been abandoned or whose parentage was unknown regardless of presumed religious origin were considered Muslims and could be adopted only by Muslims.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religion plays a role as one of many overlapping cleavages such as race and status in society. Members of differing faiths generally have a cordial and respectful relationship with one another; however governmental policies sometimes promote intolerance. The conclusion of the CPA in January contributed to improved dialogue and interaction between Muslims and Christians. Progress was also made through the work of bodies such as the SCC and the SIRC. However, feelings of mistrust and lack of confidence remained among various groups.

The SIRC began operations in 2003. It is organized as an independent NGO and consists of a General Assembly of 46 members, with equal numbers of Muslims and Christians. The General Assembly elects an Executive Bureau of 12 members equally divided between Muslims and Christians. The SCC participates in the SIRC but members of the SCC have expressed reservations about the power of the SIRC to bring about change, claiming the SIRC is overly dependent on the Government for its budget and does not represent grassroots communities. Some Muslim groups that participate in the SIRC also expressed reservations claiming that the members appointed to the SIRC have to be screened by the Government.

The SIRC, SCC and the Episcopal Church all plan seminars, workshops and other activities to further the peace process and to promote reconciliation. The SIRC has issued a publication entitled "Religion in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement" aimed at educating the public on the provisions of the CPA.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government continued to encourage respect for religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy has made it clear to the Government that improving relations among the many religions, recognizing traditions and education, allowing free movement and entry visas for visiting religious teachers and clerics, not prohibiting printing of religious materials, and promoting and supporting religious freedom through ac-

tions as well as words will help to develop a more positive relationship between the two countries.

Embassy officials met on a regular basis with leaders from many Muslim and Christian groups in Khartoum and on trips outside the capital, noting the importance of religious tolerance and the extent of U.S. interest and concern. In particular, the Embassy sponsored an event with a notable American anthropologist to discuss "Shari'a Law in Post Peace Sudan." The government-operated English language weekly magazine Sudan Now reprinted the article and several newspapers reported the findings. U.S. Embassy officers consistently raised religious freedom issues at all levels of government.

U.S. diplomatic efforts to bring about peace have included efforts to promote religious dialogue through the SIRC and SCC, and the Embassy has promoted relationships with religious leaders from both Muslim and Christian traditions. Embassy outreach has included several programs discussing religious freedom.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Sudan as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Economic measures in effect against Sudan under the International Religious Freedom Act relate to the use of the voice and vote of the United States to abstain on or oppose loans or other use of the funds of International Financial Institutions to or for Sudan (International Financial Institutions Act).

SWAZILAND

There are no formal constitutional provisions for freedom of religion; however, the Government generally respects freedom of religion in practice, although authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that they believed to have political implications. A draft constitution, expected to be adopted in 2005, would make Christianity the country's official religion; however, it also would include a provision that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion."

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 6,700 square miles and its population is an estimated 1.1 million. Christianity is the dominant religion. Zionism, a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship, is the predominant religion in rural areas. A large Roman Catholic presence, including churches, schools, and other infrastructure, continues to flourish. The population is approximately 35 percent Protestant, 30 percent Zionist, 25 percent Roman Catholic, and 1 percent Muslim. The remaining 9 percent of the population is divided among the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, the Baha'i Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Judaism, and other religious groups. Followers of Islam and the Baha'i Faith generally are located in urban areas. There are few atheists.

Missionaries inspired much of the country's early development and still play a role in rural development. Missionaries mostly are western Christians, including Baptists, Mormons, evangelical groups, and other Christian faiths. The Baha'i Faith is one of the most active non-Christian groups in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Currently, there are no formal constitutional provisions for freedom of religion; however, the Government generally respects freedom of religion in practice, although authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that were considered to have political implications. Article 24 of the draft constitution, expected to be adopted in 2005, states that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion." Swaziland has not had a constitution since 1973. Religious and other civil society groups have frequently denounced the drafting process for allowing input only from individuals and not from groups.

All religions are recognized unofficially. There is no law describing the organizational requirements of a religious group. However, new religious groups or churches are expected to register with the Government upon organizing. To be considered organized, a religious group must demonstrate possession of either substantial cash reserves or financial support from foreign religious groups with established ties to western or eastern religions. For indigenous religious groups, authorities consider demonstration of a proper building, a pastor or religious leader, and a congregation as sufficient to grant organized status. These organized religious groups are exempt from paying taxes, although they are not considered tax-deductible charities.

Portions of the capital city are zoned specifically for places of worship of all denominations. Government permission is required for the construction of new religious buildings in urban areas, and permission is required from chiefs in rural areas. Those religious groups that wish to construct new buildings may purchase a plot of land and apply for the required building permits. The Government has not restricted any religion with financial means from building a place of worship; however, non-Christian groups sometimes experience minor delays in obtaining permits from the Government to build residences for clergy.

While the Government primarily observes only certain Christian holidays, the monarchy (and by extension the Government) supports many religious activities. The Royal Family occasionally attends various evangelical programs and makes concerted efforts to attend the national Good Friday and Ascension worship services at the national stadium in the Ezulwini Valley, both of which are hosted by participating churches of the local evangelical movement. During the period covered by this report, King Mswati III used the Good Friday service to reiterate his support of Christianity as the country's main religion. The King occasionally has hosted events at his primary residence for ministers of the evangelical movement.

The Government neither restricts nor formally promotes interfaith dialogue, and it does not provide formal mechanisms for religions to reconcile differences. Religious groups have access to the courts as private entities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Followers of all religious faiths generally are free to worship without government interference or restriction, although there are exceptions.

Authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that were considered to have political implications. On October 16, 2004, police and security forces disrupted a prayer vigil held by local residents commemorating the four-year anniversary of the Macetjeni/KaMkhweli evictions. Residents of KaMkhweli and Macetjeni were evicted in 2000 for refusing to transfer their allegiance from their traditional chiefs to Prince Maguga, a brother of the King.

Officials sometimes discriminated against members of Jehovah's Witnesses. On September 2, 2004, three primary school children who are Jehovah's Witnesses were expelled from school in Lomahasha for refusing to pray during school assemblies. During the period covered by this report, the press reported that local chiefs threatened to evict members of Jehovah's Witnesses because they refused to dress in traditional mourning wear or refused to wear tassels identifying virgins. Non-Christian groups sometimes experienced minor delays in obtaining residence and building permits from the Government.

The government-owned television and radio stations do not permit non-Christian religions to broadcast messages. Christian programming is available on both of the parastatal broadcast outlets, Swazi Broadcasting and Information Service and Swazi Television. The local satellite television service, DSTV (cable service is not available), carries at least one religious channel. Church groups owned several newsletters and magazines.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. For example, five different denominations peacefully maintain ad-

joining properties in Mbabane. There was no public conflict among faiths during the period covered by this report.

Christian churches are well organized and are divided into three groups: The Council of Churches, the League of Churches, and the Conference of Churches. Each group is open to members of all denominations. However, Zionists and all African traditional churches belong to the League of Churches; most evangelical churches associate with the Conference of Churches; and Anglican, Roman Catholic, United Christian, Mennonite, Episcopal, and Methodist churches generally belong to the Council of Churches. These groups primarily produce common statements on political issues, facilitate the sharing of radio production facilities, or become involved with common rural development and missionary strategies. Although the groups sometimes strongly disagree with one another, they have found common ground on issues of concern such as support for a constitutional amendment to allow for freedom of religion.

During the period covered by this report, several very conservative clergymen urged the Government to declare the country uniquely Christian.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy maintains contact and good relations with the various religious organizations.

TANZANIA

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

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Some urban Muslim groups are sensitive to perceived discrimination in government hiring and law enforcement practices. Muslims continued to perceive government discrimination in favor of Christians in schools, the workplace, and places of worship.

There are generally amicable relations among religions in society; however, some tension persisted between Muslims and Christians and between secular and fundamentalist Muslims. In addition, on Zanzibar, some Muslims remain concerned that the 2001 Mufti Law, which allowed the Zanzibari government to appoint a mufti to oversee Muslim organizations, authorizes undue government control of religious affairs. During the reporting period, the Zanzibar government formed a Review Committee to open discussion on the revision of the Mufti Law.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 364,900 square miles, and its population is approximately 36 million, of which approximately 35 million live on the mainland and 1 million in the Zanzibar archipelago. Current statistics on religious demography are unavailable, as religious surveys were eliminated from all government census reports after 1967. However, religious leaders and sociologists generally believe that the country's population is 30 to 40 percent Christian and 30 to 40 percent Muslim, with the remainder consisting of practitioners of other faiths, traditional indigenous religions, and atheists. Zanzibar, which accounts for 2.7 percent of the country's population, is estimated to be 99 percent Muslim. A semi-autonomous archipelago, Zanzibar elects its own president to serve as the head of government for matters internal to Zanzibar, and a parliament that can approve legislation pertaining to local affairs. The Muslim population is most heavily concentrated on the Zanzibar archipelago and in the coastal areas of the mainland. There are also large Muslim minorities in inland urban areas. Between 80 and 90 percent of the country's Muslim population is Sunni; the remainder consists of several Shi'a groups, mostly of Asian descent. The Christian population is composed of Roman Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country, including Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, Mormon, Anglican, and Muslim.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on freedom of religion. The Constitution does not establish any official state religion.

The 2001 Mufti Law authorizes the President of Zanzibar to appoint an Islamic leader, or mufti. The mufti serves as a public employee of the Zanzibar Government. The mufti possesses the authority to settle all religious disputes involving Muslims, to approve any Islamic activities or gatherings on Zanzibar, to supervise all Zanzibari mosques, and to approve religious lectures by foreign clergy or the importation of Islamic literature from outside Zanzibar. The Mufti Law is controversial, because some Muslim groups believe it gives the Zanzibar Government undue influence in religious affairs. In response, the Zanzibari Ministry of Good Governance established a Review Committee to consider possible revisions to the Mufti Law. The Committee has sought input from various Muslim nongovernment organizations (NGOs), including some that have objected to the Mufti Law. In a departure from previous policy, the Office of the Mufti has also quietly engaged in a dialogue with Saudi-line Muslim groups, such as the NGO Uamsho.

On the mainland, mosques belonging to the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA) elect a mufti of their own. BAKWATA serves as an NGO, and the mainland mufti is not a public employee; however, when it was first established in 1968, BAKWATA was widely considered to be an unofficial arm of the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). To date, public opinion still associates BAKWATA with the ruling CCM party. During the reporting period, several Muslim organizations continued to criticize both Zanzibar's Mufti Law and the mainland's practice of selecting a mufti through BAKWATA, perceiving them as efforts by the union Government to institutionalize government oversight of Islamic organizations. In the first months of 2005, a loosely organized consortium, consisting of approximately thirty clerics from several Dar es Salaam mosques, publicly called for the BAKWATA mufti to resign and organized demonstrations against him. The BAKWATA leadership countered that these clerics had no authority under the BAKWATA rules to demand the mufti's resignation. Many Muslim leaders, noting that there are no parallel structures for Christians, criticize the Government for disparate treatment of the country's different religious communities.

Muslim groups have also been vocal in their opposition to the 2002 Prevention of Terrorism Act. This legislation does not mention any religious or ideological group; however, Muslim clerics, some local media, and a local human rights NGO have criticized the broadly defined powers it gives police to conduct searches, arrests, and detentions and to determine who is a terrorist. Some of the law's critics expressed fears that the legislation would be used to silence or intimidate the Muslim community. More than 2 years after the law's approval, the authorities have never arrested suspects, seized property, or applied any other sanctions under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and public debate about the law began to fade.

The Government requires that religious organizations provide information to the Registrar of Societies at the Home Affairs Ministry. To register, religious organizations must have at least 10 followers and must provide a constitution, the resumes of their leaders, and a letter of recommendation from their district commissioner. Some Muslim groups claim that they still are required to submit a letter of recommendation from BAKWATA. There were no reports that the Government refused the registration of any group.

The law requires all NGOs, including those that are religiously affiliated, to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The NGO law does not impose any new obligations on the parent organizations of religiously affiliated NGOs. On Zanzibar, the mufti has the authority to approve or deny the registration of Islamic societies under the 2001 Mufti Law.

Legitimate religious groups may import goods internationally without paying duty, provided that they receive an exemption certificate from the Revenue Authority.

Customary and statutory law governs Christians in both criminal and civil cases. Muslims are also governed by customary and statutory law in criminal cases; however, in civil cases involving family matters such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance, Islamic law is applied if both parties are Muslims. Zanzibar's court system generally parallels the mainland's legal system, and all cases tried in Zanzibari courts, except those involving constitutional issues and Islamic law, can be appealed to the Court of Appeals of the Union. In addition, whereas the majority of judges on Zanzibar are Muslim, there are very few Muslim judges, if any, on the mainland; consequently, some Muslim groups have complained that it is inappropriate for Christian judges on the mainland to continue administering Islamic law

for Muslims in civil cases involving family matters. There was occasional debate about the establishment of Shari'a law in Zanzibar, but the number of advocates remained small.

Religious organizations occasionally appeal to the secular civil authorities for assistance in resolving quasi-religious disputes over the ownership of mosques and churches, or the leadership of the organization. During the reporting period, the Tanzanian Lutheran Confederation (KKT) replaced its Secretary General. The deposed Secretary General brought a lawsuit seeking his re-instatement. In the meantime, his replacement required a police escort to take possession of his offices.

Missionaries are permitted to enter the country freely, particularly if proselytizing is ancillary to other religious activities. Citizens are permitted to leave the country for pilgrimages and other religious practices.

The Government officially recognizes eight religious holidays; this includes 2 days for Christmas, 2 days for Easter, 2 days for the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, 1 day for the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Hajj, and 1 day for the Prophet Muhammed's birthday.

Religion may be taught in public schools in the form of a class on religion, but it is not part of the national curriculum. Such classes are generally taught on an ad hoc basis by parents or other volunteers but must be approved by the school's administration and/or parent and teacher association.

In 2004, at a Dar es Salaam fundraising ceremony for the establishment of a Muslim university in Morogoro, President Benjamin Mkapa transferred government-owned office buildings to the Muslim Development Foundation (MDF), a private group of investors planning to convert the buildings into the country's first Muslim University of Tanzania. As of the end of the reporting period, the university had not yet begun to operate.

The Government made some efforts to resolve the growing tensions between Muslim and Christian communities. President Mkapa regularly participates in Muslim celebrations such as Iftars during Ramadan. In April, Minister of Cooperatives and Marketing George Kahama represented the Government at the Pope's funeral. Government officials frequently participated in interdenominational events sponsored by NGOs. In January, Justice Minister Mwapachu opened a seminar for religious leaders sponsored by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and a local NGO; the Justice Minister told the participants that the government was preparing a White Paper on the best way to organize religious supervising bodies such as the Khadis Court. In March, former President Ali Hassan Mwinyi participated in an interdenominational civic education seminar sponsored by the Global Network for Religions and Children and the U.S. Embassy.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The law prohibits preaching or distribution of materials that are considered inflammatory and that represent a threat to the public order. Government officials occasionally deny permits for religious organization to hold public gatherings if they believe that that the gathering could become confrontational or inflame religious tension. In May 2005, district authorities in Mbeya denied a permit to the Salvation Pentecost of Tanzania International, claiming that the group's recent evangelical public meetings had turned into abusive campaigns against Islam.

The Government has banned religious organizations from involvement in politics, and politicians are banned from using language intended to incite one religious group against another or to encourage religious groups to vote for certain political parties. The law imposes fines and jail time on political parties that campaign in houses of worship or educational facilities. Since general elections were scheduled for October 2005, this has become particularly pertinent. However, none of these sanctions were imposed during the reporting period.

In 2004, Zanzibari police arrested Islamic activist Sheikh Kurwa Shauri; no charges were reportedly filed, but following the arrest, the Government of Zanzibar forced him to return to Dar es Salaam. Shauri was reportedly deported under a 1993 Zanzibar government order after he was accused of disrupting the peace and fomenting interreligious conflict. There have been no further developments in this case.

On Zanzibar, the 2001 Mufti Act gives the mufti the authority to determine the date of major religious observances. The Saudi-oriented Answar Sunni group has been involved in a long-running dispute with the Zanzibar government over which Muslim leaders had the authority to set annual religious observances. In past years, Zanzibari police have broken up public gatherings of Answar Sunni and arrested the participants because they were observing Muslim holidays on the "wrong" day. In November 2004, however, Answar Sunni publicly observed Eid al-Fitr on a day

other than that designated by the mufti, and did so without incident and without interference.

The Government does not designate religion on passports or records of vital statistics; however, it requires an individual's religion to be stated on police reports, school registration forms, and applications for medical care. The Government reportedly requires individuals to indicate their religion in police reports in case the individuals are later asked to give sworn testimony, for which the individuals would need to swear in court according to their religion. The Government requires children to indicate their religion on school registration forms because some schools offer religious classes that children attend according to their faith.

Government policy forbids discrimination against individuals on the basis of religious beliefs or practices; however, individual government and business officials are alleged to favor persons who share the same religion in the conduct of business. The Muslim community claims to be disadvantaged in terms of its representation in the civil service, government, and parastatal institutions, in part because both colonial and early post-independence administrations refused to recognize the credentials of traditional Muslim schools. As a result, there is broad Muslim resentment of certain advantages that Christians are perceived to enjoy in employment and educational opportunities. Muslim leaders have complained that the number of Muslim students invited to enroll in government-run schools still is not equal to the number of Christians. In turn, Christian leaders agree that the Muslim student population in institutions of higher learning is disproportionately low; however, they blame this condition on historical circumstances and low school attendance rates by Muslims rather than discrimination.

Christians have sometimes criticized what they perceive as lingering effects of undue favoritism accorded to Muslims in appointments, jobs, and scholarships by former President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, a Muslim. On May 4, the ruling party nominated a Muslim, Foreign Minister Jakaye Kikwete, to succeed President Mkapa, who is Catholic. To date, however, perceived religious favoritism has not been a campaign issue, and there has been little public discussion of balancing government benefits among the country's many religious communities.

On the mainland, the mufti of BAKWATA called publicly in January for Muslim parents to educate their daughters, and not to give them away in early marriages. The overall situation for women is less favorable in Zanzibar than on the mainland. Although women generally are not discouraged from seeking employment outside the home, women on Zanzibar and many parts of the mainland face discriminatory restrictions on inheritance and ownership of property because of concessions by the Government and courts to customary and Islamic law. While provisions of the Marriage Act provide for certain inheritance and property rights for women residing on the mainland, the Marriage Act is not applicable in Zanzibar. Furthermore, the applicability of customary, Islamic, and statutory law on the mainland and Zanzibar depends on whether the deceased was part of a community where the customary law is widely accepted and applied and on the stated intentions of the male head of household. However, determining the intentions of the male head of household is often difficult because the majority of the country's male population does not draw last wills and testaments, as they perceive wills as invitations for bad fortune. Courts on the mainland and Zanzibar have upheld discriminatory inheritance claims, primarily in rural areas. In 2004, a government task force was created to examine possible reforms concerning women's inheritance rights. The task force gathered input from widows and conducted a media campaign to raise public awareness of inheritance as it relates to poverty and human rights.

Under a Zanzibari law popularly known as the "spinster act," unmarried Muslim women under the age of 21 who become pregnant are subject to 2 years' imprisonment, and a man found guilty of making a woman who is not his wife pregnant can be imprisoned for 5 years. In the past, Zanzibari women have successfully had these convictions dropped or overturned in the Zanzibari courts. No men have been tried under this law.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In March 2004, Zanzibari police used tear gas to disperse a demonstration by Uamsho, an umbrella organization for fundamentalist Muslim organizations on Zanzibar. The group does not recognize Zanzibar's Mufti Law and therefore had refused to seek a permit from the mufti's office as required. Seven demonstrators suffered minor injuries when the police broke up the demonstration. Thirty-two demonstrators were arrested. Two Uamsho leaders were initially charged and released on bail; later all charges were dropped.

Also during March 2004, police arrested several members of Uamsho after a series of small explosions and fire bombings damaged properties in and near Stonetown.

Police arrested 45 persons for these attacks. Some were charged and released on bail; others were released without charge. There have been no further developments, and Uamsho reports that no cases are pending against their members in connection with these incidents.

In September 2003, the paramilitary Field Force Unit (FFU) used tear gas and batons to forcibly disperse a meeting of 62 Muslims who had gathered for a religious event in Mwanza. Both the Muslim group and a Pentecostal Christian group had obtained permits for the same dates and the same venue. A confrontation between the two groups followed when the Muslim group began "comparative preaching," or claiming that Muslim religious texts proved superior to Christian texts. Police arrested six Muslims for civil unrest, inciting a disturbance, and hindering police from performing their duties. By March 2004, the Government had dropped all charges, and all were released.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

While Muslim-Christian relations remained generally stable in rural areas, tensions persist in urban centers due to claims by some Muslim or Christian groups that the Government favors the other community in its hiring and law enforcement practices. Since the country is scheduled to hold elections in October 2005, considerable attention has focused on the affiliation of the next president. The country's first three Presidents have alternated between Christian mainlanders and a Zanzibari Muslim. This informal arrangement apparently came to an end on May 4, when the ruling CCM party nominated a Muslim mainland, Jakaya Kikwete. Before Kikwete's nomination, a group of imams had said that Muslim leaders would advise Muslims about the CCM's nominee to ensure that the party's choice upheld religious tolerance and was not corrupt. The imams denied that they would insist that the candidate be Muslim; to date, they have not commented on the choice of Kikwete.

Tension also persisted between moderate Muslims and Muslim fundamentalists, as the latter believed that the former had joined with the Government for monetary and other benefits. Some fundamentalists criticize moderate Muslim organizations, such as BAKWATA, for reaching out to other religions. Fundamentalists demonstrated peacefully against the BAKWATA mufti but did not succeed in removing him.

Many interdenominational initiatives exist at national and community levels without formal government participation. During the reporting period, the press reported that contributions from Christian groups helped with the construction of a mosque in Muheza; elsewhere, Muslim leaders contributed funds to the building of a Lutheran church. From February 21 to 23, BAKWATA hosted an international meeting for countries that have observer status in the Organization of Islamic Countries; topics covered including "International Peace and Development" and "the Role of Islam in Facilitating Dialogue between Religions and Societies." A fundamentalist newspaper editorialized against the conciliatory themes, saying that outreach to other religions represented an "American agenda" rather than traditional Muslim interests.

Religion has not served as a primary fault-line for sustained political violence and conflict; however, societal violence based on religion occasionally occurs. In recent years, some religious institutions on Zanzibar have been attacked; for example, unknown perpetrators desecrated a church on Zanzibar's Pemba Island in May 2004, and the mufti's house and a vehicle belonging to a church were targeted in the series of fire bombings that rocked Stonetown in March 2004.

An interdenominational religious council continued to meet periodically to discuss issues of mutual concern. The council is composed of Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim representatives. The Muslim representative belongs to the BAKWATA. Christian and Muslim groups meet on an ad hoc basis. This interdenominational council last met on May 10 in Tanga, where the council issued a five-point statement urging religious and political leaders to behave ethically and to take concrete steps to promote social peace during the upcoming election campaign.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government encourages continued economic reform as a means to alleviate poverty, which has been identified as a contributing factor in the growth of religious intolerance. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy officials encouraged dialogue among religious groups on Zanzibar.

In 2005, the Embassy sponsored a series of civic education seminars for Christian and Muslim clergy and for young persons who were active in their churches and mosques. The seminars, which were conducted by the interdenominational Global Network for Religions and Children, brought together religious activists from throughout Dar es Salaam for discussions on the peaceful and democratic conduct of the upcoming elections. Also, the editors of leading Muslim and Christian newspapers participated in an International Visitor Program on multi-culturalism.

The Embassy also sent two key contacts to the United States on an International Visitor program entitled "Multi-Culturalism in U.S. Society," which exposed the participants to issues of religious freedom and tolerance. One of the persons is an editor for one of the largest Kiswahili daily newspapers whose readership is predominantly Muslim. The other is the secretary general of a large Christian organization that publishes a daily newspaper and has its own radio station.

Embassy representatives have made a concerted effort to extend their contacts and encourage dialogue among a wide range of religious leaders. Outreach to the Muslim community has also been enhanced by annual Iftars during Ramadan, hosted by the Charge d'Affaires in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar, and a series of English language teaching workshops in Zanzibar and the southern region of Mtwara.

TOGO

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 21,925 square miles, and its population is estimated officially at 5,090,000. The most recent available statistics, published by the Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2004, state that the population is approximately 33 percent traditional animist, 27.8 percent Catholic, 13.7 percent Sunni Muslim, and 9.5 percent Protestant. The remaining 16 percent of the population consists of various Christian (9.8 percent) and non-Christian groups (1.2 percent), and persons not affiliated with any religious group (4.9 percent). Many converts to the more widespread faiths continue to perform rituals that originated in traditional indigenous religions. The number of atheists in the country is unknown but is estimated to be small.

Most Muslims live in the central and northern regions of the country. Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians live mostly in the southern regions.

Missionaries are active in the country and represent Assembly of God, Baptist, Catholic, Protestant, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and Muslim groups.

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. For instance, the Government voted in favor of the 2004 U.N. General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance, which re-

affirmed that freedom of religion is an inherent human right. There is no state religion.

The Government recognizes seven Christian and two Muslim holy days as national holidays, including New Year, Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost Monday, Assumption, All Saints' Day, Christmas, Tabaski, and Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan).

The Government has registration requirements for recognition of religious organizations. Officially recognized religious groups that conduct humanitarian and development projects receive tax benefits on imports but must request such benefits through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Applications for registration must be submitted to the Ministry of Interior's Division of Civil Security. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, the names and addresses of executive board members, the pastor's diploma, a contract, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. The criteria for recognition are the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order.

The Government did not reject the application of any religious group but asked some organizations to resubmit their applications when their files were incomplete. At times, if an application provided insufficient information, the application remained open indefinitely. Members of groups that were not officially recognized could practice their religion but did not have legal standing.

The Civil Security Division also has enforcement responsibilities when there are problems or complaints associated with a religious organization. For example, the Civil Security Division handles noise complaints made against religious organizations, particularly noise complaints related to religious celebrations at night. The Ministry of Interior sends security forces to address the complaints.

The Government recognizes 111 religious groups, most of which are small Protestant groups and some new Muslim groups. The Ministry of Interior issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations and allows them to practice their religion, pending investigations and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years.

The Muslim Union of Togo reported that since 1991, 52 Islamic groups had registered with the Ministry of Interior and the Muslim Union of Togo, including Islamic development nongovernmental organizations and Islamic radio and television enterprises.

Foreign missionary groups are subject to the same registration requirements as other groups.

Religion classes are not part of the curriculum at public schools. Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are common; however, they do not receive funding from the Government.

There are at least seven radio stations affiliated with religious groups. Several radio stations were shut down following the April 24 presidential election, including Radio Maria, a Catholic radio station. The Government prevented Radio Maria from broadcasting for 1 month beginning April 25 because it erroneously reported the institution of a citywide curfew in Lome.

The Government had previously taken issue with a particular program broadcast by the same radio station. The government-controlled media regulatory body, High Authority for Radio-Television and Communication, or HAAC (l'Haute Autorite de l'Audio-Visuel et de la Communication) sent a formal request to Radio Maria to discontinue its program "The Years 2000 In Your Country" (Les Annes 2000 Chez Vous) in October 2004. This program consisted of a live political debate in which members of all political parties could participate and listeners could call in. The content of the broadcast was often critical of the Government. After some negotiating, the HAAC eventually required Radio Maria to take this program off the air, asserting that it was not authorized to broadcast shows with political content. The HAAC has not permitted Radio Maria to broadcast this program since October 2004 despite several appeals from the station. However, the law does not limit religious-affiliated stations to programming of an exclusively religious nature.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion and states explicitly that "no political party should identify itself with a region, an ethnic group, or a religion." There are no other laws or statutes that specifically restrict religious freedoms. Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims occupy positions of authority in the local and national governments.

Religious organizations must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those involving loud ceremonies in residential areas or that

block off city streets. The requests were granted routinely during the period covered by this report.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of different faiths regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies. Intermarriage between persons of different religions was common.

The Christian Council addressed common issues among Protestant denominations. The Council comprises the Assemblies of God, Protestant Methodist, the Baptist Convention, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran, and Evangelical Presbyterian denominations. The council continued to debate whether to expand its membership to include other Protestant organizations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborated through the Biblical Alliance.

Unlike his predecessor, the current Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lome continued to refrain from delivering political sermons in praise of President Eyadema.

Since 2002, the Catholic Church Bishops' Conference has spoken on the need for credible, transparent elections, and it has criticized the Government for amending the Constitution and electoral code and manipulating the National Election Commission. On April 17, just before the presidential election, the interim president met with several religious leaders. Among them was the Archbishop of Lome, who, in a press conference after the meeting, said he and his colleagues had urged the Government to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy organized activities to inform the public about religious freedom in the United States that featured discussions of religious diversity and tolerance in the United States. The Embassy also hosted a dinner for Muslim leaders and distributed thousands of publications on U.S. society that included key portions on religious freedom.

The Embassy included religious leaders in the International Visitor's Program and initiated an English language study scholarship program for underprivileged students, whose main beneficiaries were students of the Muslim faith. The 2-year English language program contained regular segments on aspects of life in the United States, including religious tolerance.

UGANDA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government imposed some minor restrictions.

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; however, local authorities prevented some nighttime religious meetings for security reasons.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, a proposed Domestic Relations Bill that includes new restrictions on the practice of polygyny drew thousands of Muslims to the streets in peaceful protest during the period covered by this report.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; it is also active in sponsoring efforts to promote dialogue and harmony among religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 93,070 square miles, and its population is approximately 26.7 million. Christians constitute approximately 85 percent of the population. Muslims comprise approximately 12 percent of the population. A variety of other religions, including traditional indigenous religions, Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Judaism, are practiced freely and combined represent an estimated 2 percent of the population. Among Christian groups, the Roman Catholic Church has the largest number of followers with 42 percent; the Anglican Church claims 36 percent. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Orthodox Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baptist Church, the Unification Church, and the Pentecostal Church, among others, also are active. Muslims are mainly Sunni, although there are Shi'a followers of the Aga Khan among the Asian community. Several branches of Hinduism also are represented among the Asian community. There are few atheists.

In many areas, particularly in rural settings, some religions tend to be syncretistic. Deeply held indigenous beliefs are blended into or observed alongside the rites of other religions, particularly in areas that are predominantly Christian.

Missionary groups of several denominations are active, including the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church, the Church of Uganda (part of the Anglican Communion), the Church of Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice, the Government imposed some minor restrictions.

All new indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including religious organizations, must register with the NGO Board, a division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that regulates and oversees NGO services. According to the NGO Registration Act, failure to register is a criminal offense punishable by a fine not less than \$6 (10,000 shillings) and not exceeding \$115 (200,000 shillings). Failure to pay the fine can result in imprisonment of up to a year for those managing the organization.

To register, each organization must submit the following documents to the NGO Board: a registration form for the organization signed by two promoters providing the organization's name, its objectives, the persons to whom membership is open, the membership body, titles of organization officers and their addresses, the organization's source of funding, property owned by the organization, and any privileges, immunities, or exemptions requested by the organization; a recommendation letter endorsed by the three chairmen of the local government structures and the Resident District Commissioner; two letters of recommendation by guarantors or references of the organization; a budget and plan of activities to be carried out during the first year of operation; two copies of the organization's constitution or by-laws; an organizational chart of the leadership; and a letter specifying the district of operation.

The Government refused registration to self-proclaimed religious groups on the grounds that the groups were not legitimate religious organizations.

Missionary groups face no restrictions on their activities. Foreign missionary groups, like foreign NGOs, must register with the Government. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant registration to any foreign missionary groups.

In March, more than 3,000 Muslims protested a proposed Domestic Relations Bill. The bill would restrict polygyny by permitting it only if the husband has economic means to support additional wives equally, and if the current wives consent to follow-on marriages. The bill also maintains the legal age for marriage at 18, which conflicts with the Muslim custom of permitting marriage at an earlier age with parental consent. By the end of the reporting period, the bill was still under consideration by Parliament.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the Uganda Revenue Authority still had not implemented its decision to tax religious institutions' surplus income not put to the common use of their congregations or to the good of society. However, in June 2005, Parliament passed a law that requires religious organizations to pay taxes on any properties that earn income.

Permits are necessary for the construction of facilities, including those of a religious nature. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant such permits to any religious organization.

Private Qur'anic and Christian schools are common. In public schools, religious instruction is optional, and the curriculum covers academic study of world religions

rather than instruction in one particular faith. There are also many private schools sponsored by religious groups that offer religious instruction. These schools are open to students of other faiths, but they usually do not offer minority religious instruction.

Prisoners are given the opportunity to pray on days devoted to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually are released from work duties during the month of Ramadan.

Religious holy days celebrated as national holidays include Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Some local governments have temporarily restricted operation of religious organizations for reasons of security. Local authorities in Ntungamo and Kayunga districts banned night prayers because of suspicions that people were masquerading as followers to commit crimes at night.

In March, Makerere University authorities banned evening prayers around buildings in the center of campus to prevent disruption of lectures and university office activities.

In June 2004, 76 followers of Prophetess Nabaasa Gwajwa were fined approximately \$1 (2,000 shillings) each and released from jail. The group pled guilty to charges connected to their failure to register with the Uganda Herbalists Association and protests against police actions.

The leader and members of the religious group "Jurwo Ni Mungu" (Believers in God), who were arrested in 2002 for unlawful assembly, were released from prison in June 2004 when authorities dropped the charges in the case. Their religious institution was closed at the time of their arrest for forbidding members from seeking medical treatment.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that local authorities dispersed religious meetings.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports that authorities arrested persons due to their membership in religious groups during the period covered by this report; however, in April police arrested eight people, including a minister, for inciting violence at a church service. Violence broke out among the accused when the recently transferred minister from Chanika Church of Uganda in Kisoro District insisted on presiding at the service of his former church despite his transfer.

In March 2004, armed gunmen at the Evangelical School of Technology in Yumbe District killed an American missionary couple, Donna and Warren Pett, and a Ugandan student, Isaac Juruga. Police initially arrested five persons suspected of participation in the murder. The motive for the killings is unknown but may be related to theft, local hostility to evangelical activity in a predominantly Muslim area, or a rivalry between two local clans. By the end of the reporting period, six suspects were charged with murder and were awaiting trial.

In June 2004, authorities withdrew charges and released the 12 followers of the Kitula Kebise religious group arrested for disorderly conduct in 2002.

In August 2004, eight Tablig Muslims were arrested for attacking an evangelical Christian crusade in Masaka District and for assaulting anti-riot police. A student was shot and killed by riot police and others were injured in the riot.

The rebel organization Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), is responsible for killing tens of thousands of persons in the past 19 years, kidnapping more than 20,000 children, attacking religious leaders and property, and causing more than 1.4 million persons to flee their homes and move to makeshift camps. During the period covered by this report, the Government continued its efforts to stop the LRA insurgency through a combination of military action against the LRA, attempted negotiations for a peace settlement, and provision of amnesty for rebels wishing to surrender.

Makerere University rejected the 2003 petition by the Archbishop of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uganda, Dr. John Wani, to forbid institutions of higher learning from holding exams on days of worship. University officials argued that it would be difficult and unnecessary for a secular institution to create an exam schedule that would accommodate every religious day of worship.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

Unlike the previous year, there were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

During the period covered by this report, several religious alliances, including the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, Religious Efforts for Teso and Karamoja, and the Inter-Religious Program, continued efforts to ease religious tensions and find lasting solutions to civil unrest and the insurgency in the northern part of the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; it is also active in sponsoring efforts to promote dialogue and harmony among religious groups.

During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and other U.S. Government and Embassy officials met with leaders of various religious institutions, including representatives from the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council; the Church of Uganda; the Catholic Church; the National Fellowship of Born Again Churches of Uganda; the Baha'i Faith; the Abayudaya Jewish community; the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda; and the Uganda Joint Christian Council.

The U.S. Embassy gave grants to two Muslim organizations to organize workshops on democracy and good governance. The workshops also touched on the broader themes of religious tolerance and human rights in a diverse society.

The U.S. Embassy sponsored several events to promote interfaith dialogue, forge interfaith coalitions to support peace building in conflict areas, and allow the Muslim population to voice its opinions on issues of bilateral interest. International Visitor grants allowed influential Muslim leaders to travel to the United States, where they shared their experiences with fellow Muslims. The U.S. Government works with and through faith-based organizations to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict areas.

ZAMBIA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 290,586 square miles, and its population is approximately 10 million. According to a 2000 census, approximately 87 percent of the population is Christian; 1 percent is Muslim or Hindu; 7 percent adheres to other faiths, including indigenous faiths; and 5 percent did not report its religion.

The majority of indigenous persons, throughout the country, are either Roman Catholic or Protestant; however, many Christians hold some traditional beliefs as well. In recent years, there has been an upsurge of new Pentecostal churches, commonly known as evangelical churches, which have attracted many young persons into their ranks.

Muslims are concentrated in areas where citizens of Asian origin have settled, primarily along the railroad line from Lusaka to Livingstone, in Chipata, and in other parts of the eastern province. Most Asian-origin citizens are Muslim, although Hindus constitute a sizable percentage. A small minority of indigenous persons is also Muslim.

Foreign missionary groups present include Roman Catholic, Anglican, other mainstream and evangelical churches, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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. Article 19 of the Constitution provides freedom of thought and religion to all citizens, freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance. Statutes provide effective remedies for the violation of religious freedom. These provisions are enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

The Oasis Forum—composed of the Law Association of Zambia, the Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) Coordinating Committee, the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia—continued to be active during the period covered by this report. There also continued to be reports that members of the Government criticized the Oasis Forum over the latter's stance on the constitutional review process and the mode of adoption of a new Constitution. In spite of rebukes by government officials of church leaders for taking a stand on political issues, churches continued to freely and vocally criticize the Government, organize activities, and mobilize public opinion. On February 13, the country's Roman Catholic bishops called for the adoption of a new constitution and a new electoral law before the next general election in 2006. On February 19, reacting to this call, President Mwanawasa accused church leaders of "confusing people" and warned priests against political activism. President Mwanawasa subsequently retracted his statement and apologized to the church.

Although a 1996 amendment to the Constitution declared the country a Christian nation, the Government generally respects the right of all faiths to worship freely. The proposed draft of the new Constitution does not include the Christian nation provision. Religion instruction is provided for Christians in public schools, but not Muslims.

The following holy days are considered national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

There are governmental controls that require the registration of religious groups. The Government approves without discrimination all applications for registration from religious groups. There were no reports that the Government rejected any religious groups that attempted to register. To be eligible for registration, groups must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws, and display compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. Unregistered religious groups are not allowed to operate. Violators can face a fine and imprisonment for up to 7 years.

There were no reports that foreign missionary groups faced any special requirements or restrictions beyond those imposed on other foreigners.

The Government requires religious instruction in public schools. Such instruction is conducted in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions and students from other faiths are usually excused from religious instruction. Instruction in Islam and other faiths is not available in public schools; however, it is conducted in private schools owned and controlled by those faiths. Parents can also homeschool their children.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Leaders of various ecumenical movements, such as the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia,

hold regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and interfaith dialogue and to discuss national issues.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The Ambassador and other U.S. diplomats met with representatives from Hindu, Muslim, Baha'i, and Christian organizations to foster interreligious dialogue. The Ambassador appeared on national television on numerous occasions with religious leaders and met frequently with leaders of the Muslim community.

ZIMBABWE

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 Government and the religious communities historically have had good relations; however, the Government continued to be critical of and harass religious leaders who spoke out against the Government's ongoing campaign of violent intimidation against perceived opponents. Church leaders and members who criticized the Government faced arrest and detention.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. An interfaith council, formed in 2004, seeks to build closer ties between believers of different faiths.

Through publication and dissemination of the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, the Human Rights Report and other statements, and through engagement with civil society, the U.S. Government shared its position on religious freedom to the Government and public.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 150,760 square miles, and its population is approximately 12.7 million. Between 60 and 70 percent of the population belongs to the mainstream Christian denominations, with 17 to 27 percent of the population identifying themselves as Roman Catholic. There are no reliable statistics on the exact number of Christian churches or religious movements. The evangelical denominations, mostly Pentecostal churches and Apostolic groups, are the fastest growing religious groups. An estimated 1 percent of the total population is Muslim. The remainder of the population includes practitioners of Greek Orthodoxy, Judaism, traditional indigenous religions, and indigenous syncretistic religions that mix Christianity and traditional African culture and beliefs; there also are small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, and atheists.

President Robert Mugabe is a Roman Catholic who professes to practice his faith actively, and many elites tend to be associated with one of the established Christian churches, especially the Anglican and Methodist churches.

The Muslim community consists primarily of South Asian immigrants (Indian and Pakistani), a small but growing number of indigenous Zimbabweans, migrants from other southern and eastern African countries (including Mozambique and Malawi), and a very small number of North African and Middle Eastern immigrants. There are mosques located in nearly all of the larger towns. There are 18 in the capital city of Harare, 8 in Bulawayo, and a number of mosques in rural areas. The Muslim community has expanded its outreach efforts with the aid of the Kuwaiti-sponsored African Muslim Agency (AMA); the Harare AMA office has had increased success proselytizing among the majority black indigenous population, in part because of its humanitarian projects in rural areas. Some chiefs and headmen in the rural areas have reportedly converted from Christianity to Islam.

A variety of local churches and groups have emerged from the mainstream Christian churches over the years. Some, such as the Zimbabwe Assembly of God, continue to adhere strictly to Christian beliefs and oppose the espousal of traditional religions. Other local groups, such as the Seven Apostles, combine elements of established Christian beliefs with some beliefs based on traditional African culture and religion. These groups tend to be centered on a prophetic figure, with members of the congregation identifying themselves as apostles. Many of these churches date from the early 1920s, when there was widespread racial and religious segregation.

Many of the founders of African churches broke away from Christian missionary churches when those churches chose not to incorporate traditional African culture and religion. The local churches have proliferated as a result of splits among followers of different founders.

Many persons continue to believe, to varying degrees, in traditional indigenous religions. These persons may worship in a westernized Christian church on Sundays but consult with traditional healers during the week. Traditional healers are very common in both rural and urban areas and are licensed and regulated by the Zimbabwe National African Traditional Healers' Association (ZINATHA). ZINATHA has approximately 55,000 members.

Foreign missionaries operated, including members of the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican 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; however, some practitioners of indigenous religions reportedly viewed as restrictive a law that criminalizes purporting to practice witchcraft or accusing persons of practicing witchcraft. There is no state religion, and the Government generally recognizes all religions.

The Government does not require religious institutions to be registered. Religious organizations that operate schools or medical facilities are required to register those specific institutions with the appropriate ministry regulating their activities. Similarly, religious institutions may apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Customs Department, which generally grants such requests.

The Government permits religious education in private schools. There are Islamic, Hindu, and Hebrew primary and secondary schools in the major urban areas, primarily Harare and Bulawayo. The country has had a long history of Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist primary and secondary schools. Since independence, there also has been a proliferation of evangelical basic education schools. Christian schools constitute one-third of the schools in the country; the majority are Catholic. In addition, there are several institutions of higher education that include religious studies as a core component of the curriculum.

Christmas and Easter are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, passed in November 2004, incorporated the previous Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA), which criminalized purporting to practice witchcraft, accusing persons of practicing witchcraft, hunting witches, and soliciting persons to name witches. The new Act removes the prohibitions on witch hunting and accusing another person of being a witch. The law defines witchcraft as "the use of charms and any other means or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery," and it provides punishments for intending to cause disease or injury to any person or animal through the use of witchcraft. The WSA has been used since independence primarily to protect persons, mainly women, who have been accused falsely of causing harm to persons or crops in rural areas where traditional religious practices are strong.

There was some tension between the Government and some indigenous African churches because of the preference of the latter for prayer over the science-based medical practices that have reduced avoidable childhood diseases and deaths in those communities. Some members of indigenous churches and groups believed in healing through prayer only and refused to have their children vaccinated. The Ministry of Health has had limited success in vaccinating children against communicable childhood diseases in these religious communities.

President Mugabe has expressed skepticism about the increasing membership in evangelical and indigenous churches, and has indicated that he believes that they could be subversive. According to press reports, he has refused to meet with bishops from indigenous churches since 1997.

The Government maintained a monopoly on television broadcasting through the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). The Government permitted limited religious broadcasting on ZBC and advertising in the government-controlled press by the older, established Christian churches, as well as new evangelical churches and institutions. The Government generally followed the recommendations of the Religious Advisory Board, an umbrella group of Christian denominations, on appropriate religious material to broadcast. Muslims, who were not represented on the board, have approached the board about obtaining access to airtime. According to the board, Muslims represent too small a percentage of society to take up limited

religious airtime or to merit membership on the board. Other evangelical church groups have generally opposed the inclusion of Islamic programming. However, during the period covered by this report, Muslims occasionally were allowed to conduct the daily opening prayer on ZBC. Local radio has given non-Christian religions airtime during the 5:05 a.m. broadcast of the religious hour.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, church leaders and members who criticized the Government continued to face intimidation, arrest, and detention by government officials. Foreign critics faced possible deportation.

The Government's "Operation Restore Order" mandates the destruction of purportedly illegal structures, including some places of worship and charities run by religious organizations. For example, on June 14, 2005, police in the Hatcliffe Extension high-density suburb tore down a community mosque. According to available information, the local Muslim community was informed of the impending destruction beforehand and given an opportunity to remove religious articles and other items prior to the demolition. The mosque served approximately 100 families in the area.

On June 2 the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a press statement condemning Operation Restore Order and calling for government authorities to halt the destruction. The statement asserted that history would hold those involved individually responsible for violating the dignity and human rights of those affected. Despite government interference, religious organizations have been active in aiding the victims of the operation.

On April 1, police detained 200 women associated with Women of Zimbabwe Arise who were preparing for an all-night prayer vigil to be held while awaiting election results. Several protesters were treated for injuries sustained in the arrest and some were hospitalized.

On March 12, political supporters of ZANU–PF Parliamentary candidate Sydney Sekeramayi torched a church building in the Marondera East constituency. The building was constructed in part with funds provided by MDC candidate Ian Kay.

In March 2004, Reverend Noel Scott, a Northern Ireland clergyman who has been a missionary in Bulawayo for more than 30 years, received a summons to stand trial for breaching the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) by disobeying a police officer. The charges stemmed from a 2002 incident during the run-up to presidential elections when Scott and three other church leaders were arrested for holding a street prayer meeting. By the end of the period covered by this report, no trial had been conducted.

Also in March 2004, the Government charged the Catholic diocese of Hwange and the Catholic Mater Dei Hospital in Bulawayo for allegedly exchanging foreign currency illegally. Observers suggested that the charges were intended to put pressure on the Church to desist from criticizing the Mugabe regime. The matter was settled out of court.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Baha'i, and Buddhist religious communities are relatively small, and generally are not in open competition with Christian denominations for converts. Catholic Church officials say that they welcome interfaith dialogue with Muslims.

Muslims complained of discrimination by private employers who refuse to allow them sufficient time to worship at their mosques on Fridays.

There are at least four umbrella religious organizations primarily focused on interdenominational dialogue among Christians and other interreligious activities. Muslims are not represented in any of these organizations; however, there is a new interfaith council which seeks to bring together practitioners of various faiths. A few Muslims have complained of discrimination by private employers who refuse to allow them sufficient time to worship at their mosques on Fridays.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) is an umbrella organization of all non-Catholic ecumenical Christian missionary churches, except for evangelical organizations. However, during the period covered by this report, they agreed to consider the applications of 72 evangelical churches. It maintains a secretariat in Harare, conducts development programs, has a justice and peace desk, and collaborates with the much older Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. The Catholic Church and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference have observer status within the ZCC, and relations generally are cooperative. The ZCC also has worked with other church groups and civil society organizations on social issues. The ZCC traditionally was supportive of President Mugabe, but it has become more critical as a result of the Government's politicization of food distribution and campaign of violent intimidation against opposition supporters.

The Heads of Denominations (HOD) is a pragmatic association of Christian denominations that has no spiritual or theological emphasis. It was created to enable collaboration among Christian groups and the Government in the operation of religious schools and hospitals. The HOD provides a vehicle for Christian churches to speak to the Government with a common voice on policy issues. It includes the Catholic Church, which operates a significant number of the rural hospitals and schools. The broad grouping of churches under the HOD also collaborates on a wide range of social issues including HIV/AIDS education. In conjunction with the ZCC, the Christian churches have addressed the declining economic conditions affecting their members. The HOD continues to deliberate over the role religious institutions should play in combating the HIV/AIDS crisis. Many churches already operate programs designed to help the victims of HIV/AIDS; for example, the Catholic Church and other religious and laypersons operate a center in Harare, called Mashambanzou, for orphans infected with HIV/AIDS.

Since mid-2003, several prominent evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Protestant bishops have collaborated in an attempt to bring the ruling and opposition parties back to the negotiating table to restart dialogue aimed at resolving the political crisis.

Fambidzano, which means "walking together," is a grouping of indigenous churches. It was created to give the leaders of these churches more theological and biblical education. There is little dialogue between Fambidzano and the Catholic Church; however, the two organizations are discussing the need to work with the indigenous churches, to which many persons are turning because of their emphasis on physical healing and spiritual salvation.

ZINATHA is an organization that represents traditional indigenous religions. The head of that organization is a university professor and vocal Anglican who is working to increase interreligious dialogue between ZINATHA and mainstream Christian churches.

There were continuing reports of tensions between mainstream Christian churches and practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. A notable feature of some of the indigenous churches is the acceptance of polygamy among some of its members. Sexual abuse, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and the avoidance of modern medicines reportedly are problems within these churches. In addition, leaders of the Christian churches reportedly opposed the repeal or modification of the WSA sought by practitioners of traditional indigenous religions.

Witchcraft is widely understood to encompass attempts to harm others, not only by magic but also by covert means of established efficacy such as poisons. Traditionally, witchcraft has been a common explanation for diseases of which the causes were unknown. Although traditional indigenous religions often include or accommodate belief in the efficacy of witchcraft, they generally approve of harmful witchcraft only for defensive or retaliatory purposes and purport to offer protection against it. In the past several years, interest in healing through traditional religion and through prayer reportedly has increased as HIV/AIDS has infected an estimated one-quarter of the adult population, and affordable medicines effective in treating HIV/AIDS have remained unavailable to many.

In 2004, there were two reports of possible ritual killings associated with traditional religious practices. The first was an 11-year-old girl who went missing in February and whose skull was found in June in a sugar cane field. The second was a mutilated 6-year-old girl with several body parts missing, who was found in July, a week after she was reported missing. Gordon Chavanduka, chairman of ZINATHA, reportedly has stated that the black-market demand for human body parts used in making potions has increased greatly in recent years.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Through publication and dissemination of the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, Human Rights Report and other statements, and through engagement with civil society, the U.S. Government shared its position on religious freedom with the Government and public.

The U.S. Government has regular dialogue with and supports civil society organizations that advocate and monitor respect for human rights, including freedom of religion. The Embassy meets regularly with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups, and with nongovernmental organizations that work on issues of religious freedom.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 2.9 million square miles, and its population is 20 million. According to the 2001 census, 67 percent of citizens considered themselves to be Christian, including 26 percent Roman Catholic and 20 percent Anglican. Buddhists comprised 1.9 percent of the population, Muslims 1.5 percent, Hindus 0.5 percent, and Jews 0.4 percent; all others belonging to a religion constituted 0.5 percent.

At the time of European settlement, aboriginal inhabitants followed religions that were animistic, involving belief in spirits behind the forces of nature and the influence of ancestral spirit beings. According to the 2001 census, 5,244 persons or less than 0.03 percent of respondents reported practicing aboriginal traditional religions, down from 7,359 in 1996. 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.

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, although from 1996 to 2001 the total number of Christians increased 1.5 percent. Over the past decade, increased immigration from Southeast Asia and the Middle East considerably expanded the numbers of citizens who identify themselves as Buddhists and Muslims, and it expanded the ethnic diversity of existing Christian denominations. Between 1996 and 2001, the number of Buddhists increased from 199,812 to 357,813 persons, Muslims from 200,885 to 281,578, Jews from 79,800 to 84,000, and Hindus from 67,300 to 95,500. In 2001, approximately 15 percent of citizens considered themselves to have no religion, a 1.5 percent decrease from 1996. 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 Constitution bars the Federal Government from making a law that imposes a state religion or religious observance, prohibits the free exercise of religion, or sets a religious test for a federal public office. However, these federal constitutional prohibitions do not apply to the legislative powers of the states.

Religious adherents who have suffered religious discrimination may have recourse under federal discrimination laws or through the court system. However, a 1998 review by the independent federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) found that federal laws did not adequately meet the country's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and recommended

that the Government enact a federal religious freedom act. In 2002, the Government stated that it would not do so.

During the period covered by this report, the HREOC did not report to Parliament on any religious discrimination cases involving a government agency. Under the provisions of the Federal Racial Discrimination Act, the HREOC mediates a complaint when a plaintiff's religious affiliation is considered tantamount to membership in an ethnic group. During the 12-month period ending June 30, 2004, the Commission received 11 employment-related complaints alleging discrimination on religious grounds. Another federal law, the Workplace Relations Act, prohibits termination of employment on the basis of religion.

The State of Tasmania is the only state or territory whose constitution specifically provides citizens with the right to profess and practice their religion. However, seven of the eight states and territories have laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of a person's religion or ethno-religious background. South Australia is the only jurisdiction that does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion. All jurisdictions, apart from South Australia, have established independent agencies to mediate allegations of religious discrimination.

Minority religions generally are given equal rights to land, status, and the building of places of worship. However, in the past, a number of small city councils had refused their local Muslim and Buddhist communities planning permits to construct places of worship. Those religious communities successfully appealed the councils' decisions to the courts. For instance, in November 2004, more than 200 Muslims gathered to celebrate the opening of a western Sydney Islamic prayer center, which had been subject to a construction delay because the local council had refused the developers a planning permit in 2003, reportedly deeming the center to be incompatible with local community beliefs.

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 forced religious conversion, including of minor United States 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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 nonindigenous. 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.

In 2003, in response to an increase in anti-Islamic sentiment, the HREOC undertook a project involving national consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim citizens. As part of the consultations, the Commission considered whether Muslim citizens shared an ethnic origin or race, as well as a religion, which would entitle them to comprehensive protection under the Federal Race Discrimination Act. The Commission's report, made public in June 2004, contained no findings on the racial status of Arab and Muslim citizens. However, it called on the Government to extend the coverage of anti-discrimination legislation to encompass religion.

In 2004, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry recorded 425 anti-Semitic incidents, which ranged from physical violence and property damage (25 reports) to the dissemination of anti-Semitic media (261 reports), compared to a total of 481 incidents in 2003. These numbers reflect a decline in anti-Semitic incidents after peaking in 2002 following a gradual increase over the past 15 years (the annual average being 279 incidents). The Federal Parliament and several state parliaments condemned racism against the Jewish community following the release of the Council's 2004 report.

In August 2004, three persons associated with the neo-Nazi Australian Nationalist Movement (ANM) were convicted for several graffiti attacks in February of that year on Jewish institutions in the Western Australia capital city, Perth. The ANM leader was arrested as well for criminal damage and conspiracy to cause arson. In January 2005, he pleaded not guilty to the charges and, following a brief appearance in June 2005, the case was adjourned until October 2005.

In December 2004, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal upheld a complaint made by the Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) alleging that two persons associated with Catch the Fire, a Christian group, had presented material that was “essentially hostile, demeaning, and derogatory” to Muslim persons and of Muslim religious beliefs and practices. In April 2005, a higher court rejected the defendants’ attempt to stop the judge from issuing the tribunal’s orders. In June 2005, the judge ordered the defendants to publish apologies on their group’s website and in newspapers, which was estimated to cost \$52,900 (A68,690), and to give an undertaking that they would not repeat their comments in the future. The judge did not issue an order for compensation, which was sought by the ICV. The defendants indicated that they would appeal the tribunal’s decision. An ICV spokesman stated that although the remedies were light, the Council was satisfied with the orders. Lawyers for the defendants argued that the complaint was outside the tribunal’s jurisdiction, asserting that the State of Victoria’s Racial and Religious Tolerance Act of 2001 infringed on the defendants’ constitutional right of freedom of expression.

Following the 2002 terrorist attack in Bali, Indonesia, and the initiation of military operations in Iraq in 2003, reports of threats of violence and vandalism against religious properties in all state and territory capital cities increased temporarily. Government and religious leaders called for tolerance toward minority groups and criticized vandalism of religious properties. Police forces in all states offered increased protection to religious leaders and increased patrols of religious properties. Reports of violence and vandalism against religious property declined over the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Embassy in Canberra and the U.S. Consulates General in Perth, Melbourne, and Sydney continued to conduct a nationwide outreach program aimed at promoting dialogue among all faiths. The outreach included senior-level participation in multiple Iftar events. In December 2004, the Australian Intercultural Society (AIS) presented its 2004 Peace Award for Inter-faith Relations to Consulate General Melbourne for its contribution to harmonious multicultural relations through its outreach during Ramadan to the local Islamic community.

BRUNEI

The Constitution states, “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 many restrictions on non-Shafeite and non-Islamic religious practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Practitioners of non-Muslim faiths are not allowed to proselytize, and Christian-based schools must give instruction in Islam to all students and are not allowed to teach Christianity. The Government uses a range of municipal and planning laws and other legislation to restrict the expansion of religions other than official Islam. Six of the seven persons detained in 2003 for attempting to revive the banned Al-Arqam movement were released in July 2004, and the seventh was released on May 23, 2005, after undergoing “rehabilitation,” swearing an oath of allegiance to the Sultan, and accepting a “return to the correct path and teachings of Islam.”

In December 2004, the Government, for the first time, sponsored the participation of Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim religious officials at an international conference on interfaith cooperation.

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 and forbids persons of other faiths from proselytizing. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize a range of activities to ex-

plain and propagate Islam, and they also offer financial incentives, housing, and new mosques for converts to Islam.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy supported religious freedom through a number of programs, including an Embassy-sponsored Iftar, visiting speakers, selection of a Fulbright recipient, and dialogue with government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 2,200 square miles, and its population is an estimated 360,000. The Government does not publish detailed data on religious affiliation; however, other sources indicate that 67 percent of the population is Muslim, 13 percent is Buddhist, 10 percent is Christian, and another 10 percent adheres to indigenous beliefs or other faiths. An estimated 16 percent of the population is ethnic Chinese, of which approximately half is Christian (Anglicans, Catholics, and Methodists) and half is Buddhist. There also is a large workforce composed mainly of 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 Buddhist temples, and 2 Hindu temples in the country.

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states, "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 many restrictions on non-Islamic religions and non-Shafeite practitioners.

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

In January 2005, the Government introduced legislation under the Societies Order that replaced the Societies Act. As did the act, the order compels all organizations, including religious groups not specifically mentioned in the Constitution, to register. The order also requires organizations to name all members. An organization that fails to register can face charges of unlawful assembly and be fined. Individuals who participate in or influence others to join unregistered organizations can be fined, arrested, and imprisoned. Approval to register is at the discretion of the Registrar of Societies or Commissioner of Police and may be refused for any reason.

The Government continued to use zoning laws that prohibit the use of private homes as places of worship, and in 2003, it denied permission to two Christian religious groups to register and worship collectively.

While the country has several Chinese temples, only the temple in the capital is registered officially. 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

Since the early 1990's, the Government has reinforced the legitimacy of the hereditary monarchy and the observance of traditional and Muslim values by asserting a national ideology known as the Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), or Malay Islamic Monarchy, the genesis of which reportedly dates from the 15th century. MIB principles have been adopted as the basis for government, and all meetings and ceremonies commence with a Muslim prayer. At citizenship ceremonies, non-Muslims must wear national dress, which includes Muslim head coverings for men and women.

Despite constitutional provisions providing for the full and unconstrained exercise of religious freedom, the Government restricted 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 churches, temples, or shrines. The Government allows only the practice of the official Shafeite school of Islam. It has banned several other religious groups that it considers deviant, including the radical Islamic Al-Arqam movement as well as the Baha'i Faith; however, the Government did not ban any new groups during the period covered by this report. Citizens deemed to have been influ-

enced by the teachings of such groups (usually students returning from overseas study) have been “shown the error of their ways” in study seminars organized by mainstream Islamic religious leaders. The Government readily investigated and took proscription action against purveyors of radical Islam or “deviationist” Islamic groups. The Government periodically warned the population about “outsiders” preaching radical Islamic fundamentalist or unorthodox beliefs and warned Muslims against Christian evangelists, most recently in May 2005 during a sermon at the national mosque.

A 1964 fatwa issued by the State Mufti strongly discourages Muslims from assisting non-Muslim organizations in perpetuating their faiths, and it reportedly has been used by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to influence other government authorities either to 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, Christian churches and their associated schools have been allowed, for safety reasons, to repair, expand, and renovate buildings on their sites and to carry out minor building works.

The sole official Chinese temple must obtain permission for seasonal religious events and could not organize processions outside the bounds of its half-acre site. Christian organizations are subjected to the same restrictions on processions. However, in 2005, the Government permitted Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations outside the grounds of the Chinese temple.

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 photographs viewed as undesirable or religious symbols.

The Government requires residents to carry an identity card that states the bearer’s religion. The Government also asks visitors to identify their religion on their landing cards, although many people do not comply and have not been challenged.

During the period covered by this report, conservative Islam appeared to be gaining in influence, grounded in government plans to incorporate the country’s civil law into an overarching Shari’a Islamic code; however, the incorporation was not complete. Authorities enforced Shari’a regulations, such as arresting 46 Muslims in April 2004 for not performing Friday prayers. Thirty-two of those arrested were foreigners working in the country. The offenders were fined and later released. There have been no further arrests for this reason. However, authorities continued to arrest persons for other offenses under Shari’a law, such as “khalwat” (close proximity between the sexes) and consumption of alcohol. The arresting forces in these crackdowns were comprised of civilian and religious police. Most of those arrested or detained for a first offense were fined and released, although in the past, some persons were imprisoned for up to 4 months for repeated offenses of khalwat.

Religious authorities regularly participated in raids to confiscate alcoholic beverages and non-halal meats. They also monitored restaurants and supermarkets to ensure conformity with halal practice. Restaurants and service employees that served a Muslim in daylight hours during the fasting month were subjected to fines.

The Ministry of Education requires courses on Islam and the MIB in all schools. School textbooks are illustrated to promote Islam as the norm, with all women and girls shown wearing the Muslim head covering. There are no depictions of the people or practices of other religions. The ministry prohibits the teaching of other religions and comparative religious studies. Private mission schools are required to give instruction about Islam and are not allowed to give Christian instruction. 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, the Jerudong International School, and the Panaga School are the only schools exempt from this regulation. In January 2004, under its integrated education plan to combine religious and academic education, the ministry introduced a pilot program in 38 government primary schools that requires the compulsory study of Arabic by all students. In March 2005, the ministry announced plans to compel all non-Muslim students to take a further course in Islamic knowledge.

The Government did not prohibit or restrict parents from giving religious instruction to children in their own homes.

Religious authorities encouraged Muslim women to wear the tudong, a traditional head covering, and many women did so. In government schools and at higher institutes of learning, 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). There also are reports that non-Muslim women teachers at public schools are sometimes pressured by government officials or colleagues to wear Muslim attire including the tudong.

In accordance with Qur'anic precepts, women are denied equal status with men in a number of important areas such as divorce, inheritance, and custody of children. In accordance with the 2002 amendment to the Brunei Nationality Act, citizenship can now be transmitted through the mother as well as through the father.

Marriage between Muslims and those of other faiths is not permitted under Brunei Islamic law, and non-Muslims must "voluntarily" convert to Islam if they wish to marry a Muslim. Muslims cannot convert to the religion of their non-Muslim marriage partner.

Muslims who wish to change 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 period covered by this report of persons, often foreign women, who converted to Islam as a prelude to marrying Muslims. If the marriages took place, these women faced intense official pressure not to return to their former religions or faced extraordinary delays in obtaining permission to do so. There also were known cases of divorced Muslim converts who, because of official and societal pressure, remained officially Muslim although they preferred 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. Non-Muslims who proselytized have in the past been arrested or detained and sometimes held without charges for extended periods of time; however, no such arrests or detentions occurred during the period covered by this report. Agents of the Internal Security Department monitored religious services at Christian churches, and senior church members believed that they were under intermittent surveillance.

In September 2003, the Government used the Internal Security Act to detain seven members of the banned radical Al-Arqam movement. The Government warned its citizens against involvement in any group that practices teachings that "deviate" from the country's official religion. The six were released in July 2004 and the seventh in May 2005.

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. However, it is an accepted practice for the children of parents converting to Islam to be converted to Islam as well. There were reports in the past of teenage children who refused such conversion despite family and official pressure.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In late 2004, the Government, for the first time, sponsored the participation of Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim religious officials from the country in an interfaith conference held in Jogjakarta, Indonesia. This concession to interfaith dialogue was not reported in either state-run television or in the local print media. Junior diplomatic officials represented the Government at the funeral of Pope John Paul II, and a senior government official signed a condolence book at the Brunei Catholic diocese.

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 "dakwah" or proselytizing activities and incentives to explain and propagate Islam. Among the incentives to converts, especially those from the indigenous communities in rural areas, are monthly financial assistance, new homes, electric generators, and water pumps. The religious authority also builds mosques and prayer halls for converts in these areas but will not allow the construction of churches or other non-Muslim houses of worship.

The country's national philosophy, the MIB 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. More than 100 indigenous persons converted to Christianity during the period covered by this report, and several hundred

or more converted to Islam. Consequently, Muslim officials view Christianity as the main rival to official Islam. Other than their joint participation at the December 2004 Jogjakarta conference on interfaith dialogue, there has been no reported dialogue between government officials and Christian and Buddhist leaders.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy has increased contacts and dialogue with government officials and representatives of all religious organizations. In November 2004, the U.S. Ambassador hosted the first ever interfaith Iftar to mark the breaking of the Ramadan fast. The Embassy began a program of visiting speaker programs, the second of which was hosted in May 2005 and focused on myths surrounding Islamic terrorist groups, which served to open discussion with senior Religious Affairs representatives and legal officials. The Embassy also selected a Fulbright grant recipient, the first to undertake a graduate program in Islamic Studies and Comparative Religions in the United States. Embassy representatives continued to press the Government to adhere to the spirit of its Constitution and its declarations on human rights.

BURMA

The country 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. Most adherents of religions that are registered with the authorities generally are allowed to worship as they choose; however, the Government imposes restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abuses the right to freedom of religion.

There was no change in the limited respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In October 2004, the military intelligence apparatus that, as part of its responsibilities, covertly and overtly monitored religious activities in the country was disbanded; however, the Government continued to infiltrate and monitor the meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. The Government systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom, discouraged and prohibited minority religions from constructing new places of worship, and actively promoted Buddhism over other religions, particularly among members of the minority ethnic groups. Christian and Muslim groups continued to experience difficulties in obtaining permission to repair existing churches or build new ones in most regions. Anti-Muslim violence continued to occur, as did the monitoring of Muslims' activities. Restrictions also continued on worship countrywide of non-Buddhist minority groups. There were no reports of forced conversions of non-Buddhists or forced labor to build Buddhist pagodas.

There were flare-ups of Muslim-Buddhist violence during the period covered by this report. Persistent social tensions remained between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities, largely due to old British colonial and contemporary government preferences. Widespread prejudice continued to exist against citizens of South Asian origin, most of whom are Muslims.

The U.S. Government promoted religious freedom with all facets of society, including government officials, religious leaders, private citizens, and scholars, diplomats of other governments, and international business and media representatives. Embassy representatives offered support to local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious leaders and acted as a conduit for information exchange with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders. Since 1999, the U.S. Secretary of State has designated Burma as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The U.S. Government has a wide array of economic sanctions in place against the country for its violations of human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 261,970 square miles, and its population is estimated to be 52 million. The majority of the population is Theravada Buddhist, although in practice popular Buddhism in the country 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 400,000 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 Catholics, as well as Baptists, Anglicans, and an array of other Protestant denominations), Muslims (mostly Sunni), Hindus, and practitioners of traditional Chinese and indigenous religions. According to official statistics, almost 90 percent of the population practices Buddhism, 4 percent practices Christianity, and 4 percent practices Islam. These statistics almost certainly underestimate the non-Buddhist proportion of the population. Muslim leaders claim that there are approximately 7 to 10 million Muslims in the country, which is about 14 to 20 percent of the population—although it is impossible to verify this number. There is a small Jewish community in Rangoon, and while there is a synagogue, there was neither a congregation nor a resident 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, Arakanese, and Mon ethnic minorities of the eastern, western, and southern regions. Christianity is the dominant religion among the Kachin ethnic group of the northern region and also 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 Karen and Karenni are Theravada Buddhists. In addition, some ethnic Indians are Catholics. Hinduism is practiced chiefly by the Indian population, which is concentrated in major cities and in the south-central region. Islam is practiced widely in Arakan State, where it is the dominant religion of the Rohingya minority, and in Irrawaddy Division. Islam is also practiced by Burmans, Indians, and ethnic Bengalis. The Chinese ethnic minorities generally practice traditional Chinese religions. Traditional indigenous religions are practiced widely among smaller ethnic groups in the northern regions. 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 current military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), has governed without a constitution or legislature since 1988. Most adherents of religions that are registered with the authorities generally enjoy the right to worship as they choose; however, the Government has imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently has 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 cease-fire agreements with most armed ethnic groups since 1989, active Shan, Karen, and Karenni insurgencies continued during the period covered by this report. Peace talks continued intermittently between the Government and the leading Karen insurgent group, the Karen National Union (KNU). However, there was periodic fighting between the army and the KNU and multiple army attacks on Karen villages. Successive civilian and military governments have tended to view religious freedom in the context of whether it threatens national unity.

There is no official state religion; however, in practice the Government continued to show a preference for Theravada Buddhism. Since independence, successive governments, civilian and military, have supported and associated themselves conspicuously with Buddhism. The Ministry of Religious Affairs includes a powerful Department for the Promotion and Propagation of Sasana (Buddhist teaching).

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; these requirements lead 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 provides some utility services, such as electricity, at preferential rates to recognized religious organizations and some economic benefits to the leaders of these groups. Leaders of minority religious groups are also given more freedom to travel than leaders of unrecognized organizations and members of their congregation.

Buddhist doctrine remained part of the state-mandated curriculum in all elementary schools. Students could opt out of instruction in Buddhism, and sometimes did. All students are required to recite a Buddhist prayer daily. Some Muslim students are allowed to leave the room during this act, while at some schools non-Buddhists are forced to recite the prayer. The Government continued to fund two state Sangha Universities in Rangoon and Mandalay to train Buddhist monks under the control

of the state-sponsored State Monk Coordination Committee (“Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee,” or SMNC). The Government also funded one university intended to teach noncitizens about Theravada Buddhism.

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

The Government made some nominal efforts to promote mutual understanding among practitioners of different religions. The Government maintained multireligion monuments in Rangoon and in other major cities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to show preference for Theravada Buddhism while controlling the organization and restricting the activities and expression of the monkhood (“sangha”), although some monks have resisted such control. Based on the 1990 Sangha Organization Law, the Government banned any organization of Buddhist monks other than the nine state-recognized monastic orders. These nine orders submit to the authority of the SMNC, which is elected indirectly by monks. Violations of this law are punishable by immediate, public defrocking, and often criminal penalties. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners estimated that as of January 2004, there were 300 monks in prison for various offenses.

Most recently, authorities defrocked and arrested a group of 26 monks in December 2003 and sentenced them in February 2004 to jail terms of 7 years (18 years for the leader) for refusing to accept government donations of robes and other items.

In December 2004, the regime hosted a 3-day World Buddhist Summit, despite international criticism and the last-minute withdrawal of the summit’s original Japanese sponsors due to security concerns following the October 2004 ousting of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. The summit drew approximately 1,600 attendees from around the world (although mostly from within the country). The Prime Ministers of Thailand and Laos also attended.

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 Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana handles the Government’s relations with Buddhist monks and Buddhist schools. The government-funded International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Rangoon, which opened in 1998, has as its stated purpose “to share Burma’s knowledge of Buddhism with the people of the world.” The main language of instruction is English. There are reports that the ITBMU, while in principle open to the public, accepts only candidates approved by military intelligence officials or recommended by a senior, pro-government abbot.

The junta 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 subjected all media, including religious publications and sermons, to control and censorship.

Authorities have refused to approve requests for gatherings to celebrate traditional Muslim holidays and restricted the number of Muslims that can gather in one place. For instance, Muslim groups reported that authorities selected sites for the annual Eid al-Adha sacrifices and did not allow them to occur in Rangoon. Muslims also reported that the Eid al-Adha ceremonies were restricted to 3 hours. In October 2004, the Government revoked permission at the last moment for the Methodist Church of Lower Burma to hold its 125th anniversary gala event.

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 their educational, proselytizing, and church-building activities.

In June 2005, authorities in Shwepyitha Township, Rangoon Division, arrested eight Muslims, including the imam of the community and charged them for holding group prayers at the imam’s house. At the end of the period covered by this report they remained in detention pending trial. Also, a Muslim cleric was arrested in South Dagon for holding private Qur’an courses for Muslim children at his house.

Also in June 2005, authorities forced a Muslim private tutor to close down his school. Although he was teaching only public school curriculum, he was accused of trying to convert children to Islam by offering free courses.

Government authorities continued to prohibit Christian clergy from proselytizing in some areas. Christian groups reported that several times during the period covered by this report, local authorities denied applications for residency permits of known Christian ministers attempting to move into a new township. The groups indicated this was not a widespread practice but depended on the individual community and authority. Despite this, Christian groups reported that church membership was growing, even in strongly Buddhist parts of the country.

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. Religious groups, including Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians, have brought in foreign clergy and religious workers as tourists, but they have been careful to ensure that their activities have not been perceived by the Government as proselytizing. Some Christian theological seminaries also continued to operate as did several bible schools and madrassahs. The Government has allowed some foreign religious groups, such as the Mormons, to come to the country to offer humanitarian assistance or English language training to government officials. Some of these groups, not registered with the Myanmar Council of Churches, offered religious services without government interference.

Christian groups continued to experience difficulties in obtaining permission to buy land or build new churches in most regions. In some areas, permission to repair existing places of worship was easier to acquire. Muslims reported that they essentially were banned from constructing new mosques anywhere in the country, and they had great difficulty in obtaining permission to repair or expand existing structures. Some authorities reportedly destroy informal houses of worship or unauthorized religious construction they discover. Buddhist groups are not known to have experienced similar difficulties in obtaining permission to build pagodas, monasteries, or community religious halls.

In parts of Chin State, authorities reportedly have not authorized the construction of any new churches since 1997, although in many other parts of the state, recently built churches were evident. The Government reportedly also has denied permission for churches to be built on main roads in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. In Rangoon, Mandalay, and elsewhere, authorities have reportedly allowed construction of new buildings by various Christian groups if the groups agreed not to hold services there or put up any Christian signs. One source estimated that the Government approved construction of 20 new churches in 2004.

The Religious Affairs Ministry has argued in the past that permission to construct 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 places of worship on side streets or other inconspicuous locations did so with informal approval from local authorities. However, informal approval from local authorities creates a tenuous legal situation. When local authorities or conditions have changed, informal approvals for construction have been rescinded abruptly and construction halted. In some cases, buildings have been torn down, though there were no cases reported during the period covered by this report.

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. The Government provides a small fund to recognized Christian and Muslim groups for publishing approved Burmese-language Bibles and Qur'ans. Additionally, officials have occasionally allowed local printing of limited copies of other religious material (with notation that they were for internal use only) in indigenous languages without prior approval by government censors.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of the confiscation of Bibles, Qur'ans, or other religious materials. In 2003, authorities in Rangoon reportedly seized a shipment of Qur'ans illegally imported from Bangladesh. In 2002, the German-based company Good Books for All was allowed to distribute 10,000 Bibles in the country. Bibles and Qur'ans continued to be smuggled into the country.

State censorship authorities continued to enforce special restrictions on the local publication of the Bible, the Qur'an, and Christian and Muslim publications in general. The most onerous restriction was a list of over 100 prohibited words that the

censors would not allow in Christian or Islamic literature because they are indigenous or Pali 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 were appealing these restrictions. In addition, according to other reports, the censors have objected to passages of the Old Testament and the Qur'an that they believe approve the use of violence against nonbelievers. 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 extended to all international activities by all citizens regardless of religion. The Government sometimes expedited its burdensome passport issuance procedures for Muslims making the Hajj or Buddhists going on pilgrimage to Bodhgaya, India, although it limited the number of pilgrims. During the period covered by this report, immigration and passport office officials continued to use the occasion of the Hajj to extort bribes from would-be travelers.

Religious affiliation is indicated on government-issued identification cards that citizens and permanent residents of the country are required to carry at all times. Having "Muslim" on the cards often led to harassment by police or immigration authorities. Citizens also were required to indicate their religion on some official application forms such as passports.

Non-Buddhists continued to experience employment discrimination at upper levels of the public sector. During the period covered by this report, the most senior non-Buddhist serving in the Government was the Deputy Attorney General, who was a Baptist. There were no non-Buddhists who held flag rank in the armed forces. There were no non-Buddhist members of the Central Executive Committee of the largest opposition group—the National League for Democracy—although the party remained popular among persons of all religions in the country. The Government discouraged Muslims from entering military service, and Christian or Muslim military officers who aspired a promotion beyond middle ranks were encouraged by their superiors to convert to Buddhism.

Muslims in Arakan State, on the western coast, and particularly those of the Rohingya minority group, continued to experience particularly severe legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination. The Government denied citizenship status to 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 citizenship law. Although essentially treated as foreigners, Rohingya Muslims are not issued Foreigner Registration Cards (FRCs). Instead the Government gives them "Temporary Registration Cards," which give them status preferential to a foreign resident. Non-Rohingya Muslims also are not considered citizens by the authorities. In order for these Muslims to get National Registration Cards and passports, they must pay large bribes. Ethnic Burman Muslims pay less than ethnic minority Muslims.

Since 1988, the Government has permitted only three marriages per year per village in the primarily Rohingya townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung in northern Arakan State. During the period covered by this report, the Government extended this edict to the central Arakan townships of Kyauk Pyu and Ramree Townships in central Arakan State. Following the ouster of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt in October 2004 and the demise of military intelligence, marriage restrictions were temporarily lifted but reportedly reinstated in 2005.

Muslims across the country, as well as ethnic minority groups such as Chinese and Indian, are required to obtain permission from the township authorities whenever they wish to leave their hometown. Authorities generally do not grant permission to Rohingya or Muslim Arakanese to travel from their hometowns for any purpose. However, permission sometimes can be obtained through bribery. Non-Arakanese Muslims are given more freedom to travel; however, they must also seek permission, which is usually granted after a bribe is paid.

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.

There have been no specific anti-Semitic activities by the Government. There are no apparent anti-Semitic private groups. One Christian minister, Reverend Kyi Win, circulated around Rangoon an English-language anti-Semitic diatribe. However, there was no evidence that this person had government backing or represented the views of any of the country's mainstream Christian groups.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Military forces have killed religious figures on some occasions. In 2002, troops killed 10 ethnic Karen, including a pastor, a day after being ambushed by fighters from a Karen resistance group. However, during the period covered by this report, there were no reports of such killings.

Local civilian and military authorities continued to take actions against Christian groups: arresting clergy, closing home churches, and prohibiting religious services. During the period covered by this report, authorities in the Rangoon area closed several house churches because they did not have proper authorization to hold religious meetings. Other Rangoon home churches remained operational only after paying bribes to local officials. At the same time, the authorities made it difficult, although not impossible, to obtain approval for the construction of “authorized” churches. In September 2004, a court sentenced an ethnic Chin evangelist to a month in prison for interfering with local authorities’ efforts to shut his home church in Rangoon. Evangelists in South Dagon and Hlaing Thayar townships near Rangoon were accused of proselytizing and were threatened in 2002 and 2003 with arrest if they opened house churches and kindergartens.

In early 2005, local authorities in the Chin State capital of Haka notified Baptist leaders that they would be forced to relocate an active, historic cemetery from church property to a remote location outside of town.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of authorities destroying mosques or of Muslims constructing new mosques. It remained difficult to get permission to repair existing mosques, although internal renovations were reportedly allowed. In October 2004, local authorities confiscated a Muslim cemetery in Myeik Township, Tanintharyi Division, and closed the adjacent mosque. Three Muslims were reportedly imprisoned for a month for violating this closure order. In November 2004, authorities in three suburbs of Rangoon ordered the closure of informal “religious community houses” used by local Muslims in lieu of mosques (which have not been built in these townships). After Muslim leaders in Rangoon complained, community houses in two of the three suburbs were allowed to re-open.

In 2002, local authorities in Arakan State scheduled approximately 40 mosques and religious community houses for destruction, including some in the state capital Sittwe, because they were reportedly built without permission. At that time, religious leaders in Rangoon Division and Karen State made other such allegations. Thirteen mosques were destroyed in Arakan before the authorities desisted at the request of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Government subsequently gave written permission to repair existing mosques in some areas. However, to ensure that destroyed mosques were not rebuilt, they were replaced with government-owned buildings, monasteries, and Buddhist temples.

Authorities have attempted to prevent Chin Christians from practicing their religion. In January 2005, the military commander in Matupi Township, Chin State, ordered the destruction of a 30-foot cross, raised on a hillside with government permission in 1999. Reportedly a more senior military official subsequently told local church authorities that they could get permission to reconstruct the cross. However, the local pastors have thus far refused to ask for such authorization. In the past, these crosses often have been replaced with pagodas, sometimes built with forced labor.

In the past, SPDC authorities have made efforts to “dilute” ethnic minority populations by encouraging, or even forcing, Buddhist Burmans to relocate. Certain townships in the Arakan State, such as Thandwe, Gwa, and Taung-gut, were declared “Muslim-free zones” by government decree in 1983. There are still original-resident Muslims living in Thandwe, but new Muslims are not allowed to buy property or reside in the township. Muslims no longer are permitted to live in Gwa and Taung-gut.

During the period covered by this report, there were several reports of small clashes in Rangoon and Arakan State between Muslims and Buddhist monks, particularly during or just prior to the Muslim Eid holidays. The most serious of these occurred in Kyauk Pyu, Arakan State, in January 2005. During several days of violence, two Muslims were killed and one Buddhist monk was severely injured. Some Muslim groups blamed the Government for trying to increase tensions between Buddhists and Muslims as part of a “divide and rule” strategy. Reportedly in May 2004, local Buddhist villagers in Kyun Su Township, Tanintharyi Division, attacked and destroyed the properties of 14 Muslim families. Despite a complaint from Muslim leaders, the Government had not taken any action by the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2003, there were several violent incidents involving Muslims and Buddhists. In June 2003, there were unverified reports of incitement of anti-Muslim violence by USDA members in Irrawaddy Division. In November 2003, troops reportedly

fired on monks protesting the arrest of a local abbot and killed two of them. Authorities have not investigated the incidents.

In both Kyaukse and Rangoon, witnesses claimed that many Buddhist attackers systematically were transported into and out of the Muslim areas. Others claimed to see monks carrying pistols and walkie-talkies under their robes. Muslim leaders insisted that Buddhist-Muslim relations in Rangoon and elsewhere were harmonious, suggesting only provocateurs could spark this kind of violence. While the specifics of how these attacks began and who carried them out have not been documented fully, it appears that the Government was, at best, slow to protect Muslims and their property from destruction. The violence significantly heightened tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim communities.

In the aftermath of these 2003 attacks, the authorities paid some compensation to the affected Muslims and gave permission to the Kyaukse Muslims to rebuild the two mosques destroyed in the violence. The reconstruction had not occurred because most Muslims had not returned to their previous neighborhoods. In addition, the Government arrested and defrocked 44 monks and 26 other Buddhists suspected of participation in the Kyaukse and Rangoon violence and imposed a 7 p.m. curfew on all monasteries. The curfew was subsequently limited to between 9 p.m. and 4 a.m., although it was applied countrywide. There were unverified reports that one senior monk received a death sentence; it was not known what sentences the other monks received. These measures caused some tension between the Government and the usually favored Buddhist monkhood, leading to some localized demonstrations inside Rangoon monasteries. Seventy Muslims were arrested and 31 Kyaukse Muslims were sentenced in December 2003 (1 received the death penalty) for their involvement in the violence, including the alleged murder of a senior Buddhist monk. Muslim leaders called the trials a mockery of justice, but they did not address the veracity of the charges.

Many of the roughly 20,000 Rohingya Muslims remaining in refugee camps in Bangladesh have refused to return because they fear human rights abuses, including religious persecution.

The Government continued to prevent Buddhist monks, along with all other segments of society, from calling for democracy and political dialogue with pro-democracy forces. During the period covered by this report, government efforts to control these monks included travel restrictions (notably an overnight curfew for monasteries) forbidding pro-democracy monks from delivering sermons, and a prohibition on certain monasteries from receiving political party members as overnight guests, although monasteries regularly do by calling the party members "honored donors."

There were no known arrests of Buddhist monks or nuns during the period covered by this report. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) estimated that as of January 2004, there were 300 Buddhist monks in prison for various offenses. The number of non-Buddhist religious figures in prison or those imprisoned for their religious beliefs was unknown. The AAPP estimate could not be verified nor could a complete listing of those imprisoned be obtained. Monks serving sentences of life in prison reportedly included the Venerable U Thondara of Myingyan (arrested during the 1988 anti-government demonstrations).

Muslim leaders reported that military intelligence officials arrested several Muslim religious teachers in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, in September 2004 following a fatwa issued against individuals who had allegedly raped a Muslim girl. One of the teachers reportedly was tortured to death in detention. The others were subsequently released.

There continued to be credible reports from diverse regions of the country that government officials compelled persons, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, especially in rural areas, to contribute money, food, or materials to state-sponsored projects to build, renovate, or maintain Buddhist religious shrines or monuments. The Government denied that it used coercion and called these contributions "voluntary donations" consistent with Buddhist ideas of merit making. Unlike in previous years, during the period covered by this report, there were no reports that Muslims or Christians were compelled to build Buddhist pagodas.

In the past, pagodas or government buildings often have been built on confiscated Muslim land. In 2003, authorities in Kyun Su Township, Tanintharyi Division, seized Muslim religious land on which they planned to build a pagoda. Despite complaints by Muslim leaders to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the regional military commander, the Government had taken no action in this case by the end of the period covered by this report.

Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), has been in prison or house arrest since forces allied with the Government attacked her and her convoy, which included several NLD-allied monks, while trav-

eling in Sagaing Division in the northwestern region of the country in 2003. The Government reportedly used criminals dressed in monks' robes in the ambush.

Forced Religious Conversion

Muslim and Christian community leaders reported that during the period covered by this report, authorities had moved away from a campaign of forced conversion to Buddhism and instead focused on enticing non-Buddhists to convert to Buddhism using charitable activities or outright bribery. Conversion of non-Buddhists, coerced or otherwise, is part of a longstanding Government campaign to "Burmanize" ethnic minority regions. This campaign has coincided, in Chin State in particular, with increased military presence. In October 2004, in northwestern Shan State, a local government-backed abbot reportedly pressured local Christians to convert to Buddhism, using threats or bribery. Also during the period, there was a single, unverified report of forced conversions at gunpoint in Chin State. However, Christian groups reported these types of violent cases were less frequent than 2 or 3 years ago.

While in the past, there were credible reports that hundreds of Christian tribal Nagas in the country had been converted forcibly to Buddhism by the country's military, reliable sources indicate that this sort of activity has not occurred in recent years.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are social tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities. Preferential treatment, 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 ethnic Indians, particularly ethnic Bengalis, many of whom are Muslims.

Since 1994, when the pro-government Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) was organized, there has been armed conflict between the DKBA and the predominantly Christian anti-government 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. In August 2004, according to a reliable report, DKBA authorities forced villagers near Hpa'An, Karen State to provide "volunteer" labor and money to build Buddhist pagodas. Despite a complaint by the local pastor, senior government authorities refused to take any action. There were also unverified reports that DKBA authorities expelled villagers who converted to Christianity. In 2003, there was an unverified report that local DKBA commanders forced the local "sangha" council to order the demolition of six monasteries in Myawaddy whose abbots had been critical of the DKBA.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Government restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and movement, including diplomatic travel, make it difficult to obtain timely and accurate information on human rights in the country, including freedom of religion. Information about abuses often becomes available only months or years after the events and frequently is difficult or impossible to verify. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, while criticizing the U.S. Government in September 2004 for its "lack of basic knowledge and misperceptions regarding the situation and concept of religions" in the country, formally declined to meet with U.S. Embassy officials to discuss the content of the previous year's report.

The Embassy continued to promote religious freedom in its contacts with all facets of society. During the period covered by this report, Embassy officials discussed the importance of improved religious freedom with government and military officials, private citizens, scholars, representatives of other governments, and international business and media representatives. Embassy representatives met regularly 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. The Embassy focused on the importance of religious tolerance by hosting interfaith workshops and discussions with visiting speakers and by translating and subtitled a videotape on religious diversity in the

United States. The Ambassador hosted regular receptions for senior members of Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim organizations.

Through outreach and traveling as much as permitted by the Government, Embassy representatives offered support to local NGOs and religious leaders and acted as a conduit for information exchange with otherwise isolated human rights NGOs and religious leaders. Representatives of the Rohingya minority participated in English language and current events studies at the Embassy's American Center.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Burma as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Because of the country's poor human rights situation, including its abuses of religious freedom, the United States imposes extensive sanctions on the regime. These sanctions include a ban on imports from the country, a ban on the export of financial services to the country, a ban on bilateral aid to the Government, a ban on the export of arms to the country, and a suspension of the generalized system of preference benefits and Export Import Bank financial services in support of U.S. exports to the country. The U.S. Government also 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, controlled issuance of visas to high-ranking government and military officials and their immediate family members, and froze SPDC assets in the United States. 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 May 1997.

CAMBODIA

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

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area 67,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 13.4 million. An estimated 93 percent of the population is Hinayana, or Theravada, Buddhist. The Hinayana Buddhist tradition is widespread and strong in all provinces, with an estimated 4,100 pagodas found throughout the country. Since the vast majority of ethnic Khmer Cambodians are Buddhist, there is a close association between Buddhism, Khmer cultural traditions, and daily life. Adherence to Buddhism generally is considered intrinsic to the country's ethnic and cultural identity. The Mahayana branch of Buddhism is practiced by approximately 150,000 followers and has 63 temples throughout the country.

There are approximately 700,000 Muslims (an estimated 5 percent of the population), 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: the Malay-influenced Shafi branch, which constitutes 88 percent of Cham Muslims; the Saudi-Kuwaiti influenced Salafi (sometimes called "Wahhabi") branch, which represents 6 percent of the Muslim population; the traditional Iman-San branch, practiced by 3 percent; and the Kadiani branch, which also represents 3 percent. There are 2,207 Muslim mosques of the 4 main branches and 270 small Surav mosques, which have congregations of up to 40 persons and do not have a Minbar from which Friday sermons are given. The small, although growing, Christian community constitutes approximately 2 percent of the population. There are an estimated 100 Christian organizations or denominations that operate freely throughout the country and include approximately 2,400 churches. However, only 900 of these churches are officially registered. Other religious organizations with small followings include the Vietnamese Cao Dai religion and the Baha'i Faith, each with an estimated 2,000 practicing members.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Church of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses, operate freely. They face no barriers, except for a ban on door-to-door proselytizing during the daily lunch hours of 12:00 to 2:00 p.m.

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 does not tolerate abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors. However, 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 Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The law requires all religious groups, including Buddhist ones, to submit applications to the Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs to construct places of worship and conduct religious activities. In their applications, groups must state clearly their religious purposes and activities, which must comply with provisions forbidding religious groups from insulting other religious groups, creating disputes, or undermining national security. However, there is no penalty for failing to register and in practice some groups do not.

In April 2005, an Islamic conference, which gathered approximately 20,000 Muslims from throughout the country and from other countries, was held in Kampong Cham Province without obtaining permission from the Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs. Organizers obtained permission only from the district level for the conference. Local and national authorities did not interfere with or sanction the organizers. Religious groups have not encountered significant difficulties in obtaining approval for construction of places of worship. No significant constraints on religious assembly were reported during the period covered by this report.

The Directive on Controlling External Religions requires registration of places of worship and religious schools, in addition to government approval prior to constructing new places of worship. Places of worship must be located at least 2 kilometers from each other and may not be used for political purposes or to house criminals or fugitives from the law. The distance limitation has begun to be enforced, but applies only to new construction of places of worship and not to offices of religious organizations. The order requires that religious teachings respect other religions.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. 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. However, officials also expressed some concern that foreign groups use the guise of religion to become involved in illegal or political affairs. The Um Al-qura elementary and secondary madrassah was closed by the Government in 2003 on suspicion of involvement with terrorist groups. The facility was officially reopened in September 2004 as "The Cambodian Islamic Center." On December 29, 2004, a court convicted three persons connected with the school of assisting in a planned terrorist attack on the embassy of a Western country.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Minority religions experienced little or no societal discrimination during the period covered by this report; however, Muslims and Christians reported a few minor conflicts. The most serious incident, which occurred on April 16, 2005, involved villagers in Kampong Thom Province who accused a group of Christian boys of damaging a Buddha statue while playing in the pagoda. The police briefly detained and then released the boys for lack of evidence and calmed the villagers down, avoiding further conflict.

Occasional tensions have been reported among the branches of Islam that receive monetary support from groups in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Malaysia, or Indonesia, depending on the tenets of the branch. Some Buddhists also have expressed concern about the Cham Muslim community receiving financial assistance from foreign countries. However, in general, Cham Muslims are well-integrated into society, enjoy positions of prominence in business and the Government, and faced no reported acts of discrimination or abuse during the period covered by this report.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives met with religious leaders on these issues and contacted representatives of religious non-governmental organizations and other groups representing the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian faiths. The Embassy continued its Muslim outreach program, which provides for additional channels of information on the status of religious freedom in the country among the Muslim population while also providing material assistance. Through this program, the U.S. Government gave assistance to two Islamic organizations that actively conducted human rights and democracy training in Phnom Penh and Kompong Cham Province to increase awareness of human rights within the Khmer Muslim community. In 2004, the Embassy provided small grants to three additional Muslim groups, including the Cham Muslim radio hour. The Embassy's outreach program distributed Khmer-language versions of the booklet "Muslim Life in America" throughout 10 provinces.

CHINA (INCLUDES TAIWAN ONLY)

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 (AIT) discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Taiwan has an area of approximately 13,800 square miles and an estimated population of 23 million. While the authorities do not collect or independently verify statistics on religious affiliation, they maintain registration statistics voluntarily reported by religious organizations. In 2004, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) Religious Affairs Section reported that 35.1 percent of the population consider themselves Buddhist; 33 percent Taoist; 3.5 percent I Kuan Tao; 2.6 percent Protestant; 1.2 percent Roman Catholic; 1.1 percent Mi Le Da Dao; 0.2 percent Sunni Muslim. Approximately 4.1 percent of the population follows traditional Chinese religions such as Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion), Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor Religion), and Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion). There also are a small number of Jews.

In addition, the Church of Scientology reported 20,000 members; the Baha'i Faith 16,000; Confucians 13,000; World Red Swastika Society 5; Zhonghua Sheng Chiao (Chinese Holy Religion) 3,200; Maitreya Emperor Religion 3,000; Ta I Chiao (Great Changes Religion) 1,000; Mahikari Religion 1,000; and Huang Chung (Yellow Middle) 1,000. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), Secret Sect of Tibetan Lamaism (Mizong Buddhism), and the Unification Church are also registered but did not provide membership statistics. One new religious group reg-

istered during the period covered by this report, Hsuan Men Chen Tsung, with 5,000 members.

Other Christian denominations include Presbyterians, True Jesus, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. More than 70 percent of the indigenous population (Aborigines) is Christian.

While the overwhelming majority of religious adherents are either Buddhist or Taoist, many people consider themselves both Buddhist and Taoist. Approximately 50 percent of the population regularly participates in some form of organized religious practice. According to the Religious Affairs Section of the MOI, almost 14 percent of the population is thought to be atheist.

In addition to practicing religion, many persons also follow a collection of beliefs deeply ingrained in Chinese culture that can be termed "traditional Chinese folk religion." These beliefs include, but are not limited to, shamanism, ancestor worship, magic, ghosts and other spirits, and aspects of animism. Researchers have estimated that as much as 80 percent of the population believes in some form of traditional folk religion. Such folk religions may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions. The open, syncretistic nature of religion in Taiwan is such that many Buddhist and Taoist temples will include Christian icons, including statues of Jesus and Mary, in the display of altar deities. There also may be an overlap between practitioners of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism with those of Falun Gong, which is registered as a civic rather than religious organization. Falun Gong, which considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, was introduced by a National Taiwan University professor, who reports that membership has grown rapidly in recent years and now totals approximately 500,000.

Religious beliefs cross political and geographic lines. Members of the political leadership practice various faiths. Regardless of political affiliation, every year tens of thousands of Buddhists and Taoists from Taiwan go to mainland China on temple pilgrimages. Their mainland Chinese counterparts are also invited to participate in religious activities held in Taiwan, such as the annual festival of the Goddess of the Sea held in the third month of the lunar calendar. However, the number of mainland Chinese participants remains small because of travel restrictions between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC). After China passed the Anti-Secession Law in March 2005, Taiwan's Executive Yuan asked local government officials, such as mayors and magistrates, to refrain from leading religious pilgrimages to the PRC.

Foreign missionary groups are active in Taiwan, including Mormons 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 do not tolerate the abuse of religious freedom, either by the authorities or private actors. There is no state religion.

Although registration is not mandatory, 26 religious organizations have registered with the MOI Religious Affairs Section. Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, or the chapter of the Civil Code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship may register with local authorities, many choose not to 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 religious groups whose doctrines were not clear; however, there were no reports that the authorities sought to deny registration to new groups during the period covered by this report. The only ramification for non-registration is the forfeiture of the tax advantages that are available for registered religious organizations.

Religious instruction is not permitted in public or private elementary, middle, and high schools accredited by the Ministry of Education. Religious organizations are permitted to operate schools, but religious instruction is not permitted in those schools. Schools not accredited by the Ministry of Education may provide religious instruction. High schools may provide general courses in religious studies, and universities and research institutions have religious studies departments. Theological seminaries are operated by religious organizations.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely in Taiwan.

The MOI promotes interfaith understanding among religious groups by sponsoring symposiums, or helping to defray the expenses of privately sponsored symposiums on religious issues. The MOI also publishes and updates an introduction to major religious beliefs and groups based on material provided by the groups. This introduction is also available on the internet. In addition, the MOI holds annual ceremonies to honor religious groups that have made contributions to public service, social welfare, and to other activities promoting social harmony and serving the underprivileged.

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 United States 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 sponsors summer seminars every year to help college students understand the practice of major religions in Taiwan. The 2004 seminar was held in August at Catholic Fu Jen University in Taipei.

Some religious groups have a tendency to take political positions. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has been active in politics, particularly in support of the pro-independence movement, and maintains contact with some elements of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The American Institute in Taiwan discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The AIT is in frequent contact with representatives of human rights organizations and regularly meets with leaders of various religious communities.

CHINA

Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibetan areas of China are appended 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 activities of religious groups. The Government tries to control and regulate religion 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). Nonetheless, 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, including intimidation, harassment, and detention. In some localities, "underground" religious leaders reported ongoing pressure to register with the State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA) or its provincial and local offices, known as Religious Affairs Bureaus (RAB). Some unregistered religious groups also reported facing pressure to be

affiliated with and supervised by official government-sanctioned religious associations linked to the five main religions—Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

The extent of religious freedom varied widely within the country. For example, officials in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) tightly controlled religious activity, while Muslims elsewhere in the country enjoyed greater religious freedom. Treatment of unregistered groups also varied regionally. For example, some local officials in Henan Province often mistreated unregistered Protestants, and some local officials in Hebei Province tightly controlled Catholics loyal to the Vatican. In other localities, however, officials worked closely with registered and unregistered Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups to accomplish religious and social goals.

Government officials continued to scrutinize closely contacts between citizens and foreigners involved in religion. The Government detained some citizens for providing religious information to foreigners and prevented some religious figures from traveling abroad. Among them was Henan Province Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang, whom authorities detained on December 1, 2004. However, many religious adherents reported that they were able to practice their faith openly in officially registered places of worship without interference from authorities. Official sources, religious professionals, and persons who attend services at both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the number of believers in the country continued to grow.

The Government passed new regulations on religious affairs, which took effect on March 1, 2005. The regulations are an attempt to bring regulatory activities governing religious affairs within a legal framework. The regulations made no reference to five official religions. Some saw the new regulations as reflecting a more tolerant atmosphere and establishing legally protected rights for religious groups to engage in activities such as publishing, education, and social work. Others criticized the regulations as merely codifying past practice and questioned whether they would enhance religious freedom.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman explicitly stated at a March 15 press conference that the country has no restrictions against minors receiving religious education. In many areas of the country, children were able to participate in religious life with their parents, but local officials in some areas forbade children from full religious participation. For example, local officials in Xinjiang stated that persons younger than 18 are forbidden from entering mosques and from receiving religious education.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as “cults” in general and of small Christian-based groups and the Falun Gong in particular. Arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued, and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons, reeducation-through-labor camps, and extra-judicial “legal education” centers. Falun Gong adherents engaged in few public activities within China during the period covered by this report, perhaps due to the strength of the Government’s campaign against the group. However, there were continuing revelations about the extra-legal activities of the Government’s “610 office,” implicated in most alleged abuses of Falun Gong practitioners.

Some social tension exists between religious believers and non-believers. Religious communities generally coexist without significant friction.

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. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with Government leaders, including in his November 2004 meeting with President Hu Jintao at the APEC summit. Secretary Rice discussed religious freedom and attended a church service during her March 2005 visit to Beijing. Senior U.S. officials called on the Government to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and to respect religious freedom. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China a “Country of Particular Concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In Washington and in Beijing, in public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect citizens’ constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise religious freedom and to release all those serving sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 3.5 million square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2005 Government White Paper, there are “more than 100 million religious adherents,” representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. According to this official publication, the country has more than 85,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, and more than 3,000 religious organizations. These same official statistics have been used unchanged since 1997, when the State Council Information Office published a White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief. Given the growth in religion since 1997, unpublished estimates suggest the country has over 200 million believers and 100,000 sites for religious activities.

The country has five main religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. While these are the primary religions, the 2005 religious affairs regulations no longer identify “official” religions. The Russian Orthodox Church also operates in some regions and other religions exist in the country’s expatriate community. Most of the country’s population does not formally practice any religion. Approximately 8 percent of the population is Buddhist, approximately 1.5 percent is Muslim, an estimated 0.4 percent belongs to the official Catholic Church, an estimated 0.4 to 0.6 percent belongs to the unofficial Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church, an estimated 1.2 to 1.5 percent is registered as Protestant, and perhaps 2.5 percent worships in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control.

Religious officials offer no official estimate of the number of Taoists, but academics place the number at several hundred thousand. According to the Taoist Association, there are more than 25,000 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.

The Government estimates that there are more than 100 million Buddhists, making Buddhism the organized religion with the largest body of followers. 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. Most believers, including most ethnic Han Buddhists, practice Mahayana Buddhism. Most Tibetans and ethnic Mongolians practice Tibetan Buddhism, a Mahayana adaptation. Some ethnic minorities in southwest Yunnan Province practice Theravada Buddhism, the dominant tradition in neighboring Southeast Asia.

According to government figures, there are 20 million Muslims, more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (more than half of which are in Xinjiang), and more than 45,000 imams nationwide. The country has 10 predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Hui, estimated to number nearly 10 million. Hui are centered in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, but there are significant concentrations of Hui throughout the country, including in Gansu, Henan, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Hebei Provinces and in Xinjiang. Hui slightly outnumber Uighur Muslims, who live primarily in Xinjiang. According to an official 2005 report, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region had 23,788 mosques and 26,000 clerics at the end of 2003, but observers noted that fewer than half of the mosques were authorized to hold Friday prayer and holiday services. The country also has over 1 million Kazakh Muslims and thousands of Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baoan, and Tatar Muslims.

The unofficial, Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church claims a membership larger than the 5 million persons registered with the official Catholic Church. Precise figures are impossible to determine, but Vatican officials have estimated that the country has as many as 10 million Catholics in both the official and unofficial churches. Chinese Catholic sources put the total number at approximately 8 million. According to official figures, the government-approved Catholic Church has 67 bishops, 5,000 priests and nuns, and more than 6,000 churches and meetinghouses. There are thought to be more than 40 bishops operating “underground,” some of whom are likely in prison or under house arrest.

The Government maintains that the country has more than 16 million Protestants, more than 55,000 registered churches and other places of worship, and 18 theological schools. Protestant church officials have estimated that at least 20 million Chinese worship in official churches. Foreign and local academics put the number of Protestants between 30 and 100 million. A 2004 non-governmental survey in Beijing tallied over 100,000 unregistered Protestants, far more than the 30,000 reg-

istered with authorities. Domestic and foreign experts agree that the number of Protestants is growing rapidly. According to state-run media reports in August 2004, the number of Protestants is increasing by up to 600,000 annually.

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. 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. 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 estimate that the true number of Falun Gong adherents in the country before the crackdown was much higher. The number has declined as a result of the crackdown, but there are still hundreds of thousands of practitioners in the country, according to reliable estimates.

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 manage religious affairs by restricting religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship, and to control the growth and scope of activities of religious groups to prevent the rise of possible competing 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. For each of the five main religions, there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities, and with which religious groups must affiliate. The SARA is responsible for monitoring and judging the legitimacy of religious activity. The SARA and the CCP United Front Work Department (UFD) provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of government regulations regarding religious activity, including the role of foreigners in religious activity. Employees of SARA and the UFD are rarely religious adherents and often are party members. Communist Party members are directed by party doctrine to be atheists.

On November 30, 2004, Premier Wen Jiabao signed new religious affairs regulations, which became effective on March 1, 2005. The new regulations replace previous 1994 regulations governing religious sites (although 1994 regulations governing religious activities by foreigners remain in effect). The regulations bring regulatory practices governing religious affairs within a legal framework and into compliance with China's Administrative Licensing Law.

Unlike the 1994 regulations, the new regulations protect the rights of registered religious groups, under certain conditions, to possess property, publish literature, train and approve clergy, and collect donations. Some commentators said the new regulations could create opportunities for other faiths and previously unregistered groups to expand their presence in China because the regulations no longer classify the five main religions as "official" religions. Critics said the new regulations merely codify past practices and give authorities broad discretion to define which religious activities are permissible.

Like the 1994 law, the new regulations require religious groups to register places of worship. Spiritual activities in places of worship that have not registered may be considered illegal and participants can be punished. There are five requirements for the registration of "sites for religious activities": First, establishment of the site must be consistent with the overall purpose of the religious affairs regulations and must not be used to "disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the state" and must not be "subject to any foreign domination." Second, local religious citizens must have a need to carry out collective religious activities frequently. Third, there must be religious personnel qualified to preside over the activities. Fourth, the site must have "necessary funds." Fifth, the site must be "rationally located" so as not to interfere with normal production and neighboring residents. 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 main faiths.

Under the new regulations clergy need not be approved by the Government, but must be reported to the Government after being selected pursuant to the rules of the relevant religious association.

Prior to the new regulations, nearly all local RAB officials require Protestant churches to affiliate with the (Protestant) Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC). Credentialing procedures effectively required clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC, a practice which so far appeared unchanged since adoption of the new regulations. Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refuse to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC. Some groups disagree with the TSPM/CCC teachings that all Protestant beliefs are compatible and that differences between Protestant denominations are irrelevant. In a few regions, Protestant groups have registered without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. These exceptions include the Local Assemblies Protestant churches in Zhejiang Province, where no significant TSPM/CCC community exists, and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province, both of which operate openly without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. Additionally, the (Russian) Orthodox Church has been able to operate without affiliating with a government organization in a few parts of the country. In other regions, officially “post-denominational” Protestant churches informally aligned themselves with Protestant denominations. Some pastors in official churches said that denominational affiliation was an important way of drawing parishioners.

Some groups register voluntarily, some register under pressure, and the authorities refuse to register others. Some religious groups have declined to register out of principled opposition to state control of religion. Others do not register 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 for fear that doing so would require theological compromises, curtail doctrinal freedom, or allow government authorities to control sermon content. Some groups claimed that authorities refused them registration without explanation or detained group members who met with officials to attempt to register. The Government contended that these refusals mainly were the result of these groups’ lack of adequate facilities or failure to meet other legal requirements. At the end of the period covered by this report, it was too early to tell whether the new regulations would result in an increase in the number of or an expansion in the type of registered religious groups.

The Government has banned all groups that it has determined to be “cults,” including 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, the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), the Servants of Three Classes, the Association of Disciples, the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, the Family of Love, the South China Church, 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. A ban on cults, including the Falun Gong spiritual movement, was enacted in 1999. Under Article 300 of the Criminal Law, “cult” members who “disrupt public order” or distribute publications may be sentenced to from 3 to 7 years in prison, while “cult” leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to 7 years or more in prison.

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 or tightly control religious expression and teaching. Police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused by the Government of supporting separatism. The Government permits, and in some cases subsidizes, Muslim citizens who make the Hajj to Mecca. In the first half of 2005, nearly 10,000 Chinese Muslims made the Hajj, half of them on government-organized delegations.

In past years, local officials destroyed several unregistered places of worship, although there were no reports of widespread razing of churches or shrines during the period covered by this report. 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. In 2003, for example, construction began in Beijing on the first new Protestant churches to be constructed in the capital since the People’s Republic was founded in 1949. 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.

In January 2005, the Government organized a national meeting on religion. The meeting addressed similar themes to a series of conferences on religion in January 2004 that advised officials to guard against Christian-influenced “cults” and avoid “foreign infiltration under cover of religion.” In early 2005, five Government training sessions were held across the country for some 3,000 religious affairs officials to educate them about the new religious affairs regulations.

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 many 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 sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP.

Some local authorities continued a selective crackdown on unregistered religious groups, and the Central Government did not oppose this crackdown. Police closed unregistered mosques and temples, as well as some Catholic churches and Protestant “house churches,” many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. Several unregistered church leaders reported continuing pressure from local authorities. Despite these efforts at control, official sources, religious professionals, and members of both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the number of religious adherents in the country continued to grow.

The Government makes political demands on the clergy or leadership of registered groups. For example, authorities have required clergy to publicly endorse government policies or denounce Falun Gong. In other areas, including Xinjiang and the Tibetan Autonomous Region, authorities require clergy to participate in patriotic education. 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 groups that blend tenets from a number of religious beliefs. The Government also sought to regulate closely the financial affairs of Buddhist and Taoist temples.

During the period covered by this report, government repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement continued. At the National People’s Congress session in March 2004, Premier Wen Jiabao’s Government Work Report emphasized that the Government would “expand and deepen its battle against cults,” including Falun Gong. There were credible reports of torture and deaths in custody of Falun Gong practitioners.

The authorities also continued to oppose other groups considered “cults,” such as the Xiang Gong, Guo Gong, and Zhong Gong qigong groups.

The Government has labeled folk religions as “feudal superstition,” and followers sometimes were subject to harassment and repression.

Despite the new religious affairs regulations, officials in many locations continued to pressure religious groups 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. 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.

Local officials have great discretion in determining whether “house churches” violate regulations. The term “house church” is used to describe both unregistered churches and gatherings in homes or businesses of groups of Christians to conduct small, private worship services. SARA officials confirmed during the year that un-

registered churches are illegal, but prayer meetings and Bible study groups held among friends and family in homes are legal and need not register. 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 not permitted. 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 or with co-religionists overseas. Urban house churches are generally limited to meetings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas may number in the hundreds.

Both official and unofficial Christian churches have problems training adequate numbers of clergy to meet the needs of their growing congregations. Due to restrictions and prohibitions 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 states that the official Catholic Church has trained more than 900 priests in the past 10 years. 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 obtaining approval to study abroad. In most cases, foreign organizations provide funding for such training programs. In the past, some Catholic clerics had 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.

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 many official organizations. Communist Party officials restated during the period covered by this report that party membership and religious belief were incompatible. The CCP reportedly has issued two circulars since 1995 ordering party members not to hold 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 General 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.

In past years, government sources reported that 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 Buddhists 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 Phagpalha Geleg Namgyal, 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.

The Government's refusal to allow the government-authorized Patriotic 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 Patriotic Catholic Church on the grounds that this denies one of the foundational tenets of their faith. Pressure by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association on underground Catholic bishops to join the official Church continued, and underground priests and bishops were often detained. In the past, authorities reorganized dioceses without consulting church leaders, but there have been no such reports recently.

The Government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and there is no Vatican representative on the Mainland. The Vatican's diplomatic recognition of Taiwan remained the primary obstacle to improved relations, Government officials said, although differences over selection of Bishops remained a significant area of dispute. After the death of Pope John Paul II, Government and religious officials made conciliatory statements but did not send a delegation to the

Pope's funeral. Official Catholic churches were encouraged to hold Masses remembering Pope John Paul II, however, and tens of thousands of Chinese across the country took part. Official Catholic Churches welcomed Pope Benedict XVI, and his picture was displayed prominently in many official and unofficial Catholic venues across the country. The Government also minimized historical disputes with the Vatican, such as the canonization of saints on Chinese National Day in 2000.

Most bishops of the official Catholic Church have, in fact, been recognized by the Vatican either before or after their appointment by the Government. In a few cases, the bishop named by the government-affiliated church conflicted directly with the bishop recognized by the Vatican, a situation that contributed significantly to tension between the official and unofficial Catholic churches and to tension between the Vatican and the Government. There was friction between some bishops of the Patriotic Church who have been consecrated with secret Vatican approval (or who obtained such secret approval after their consecration) and others consecrated without such approval. Despite these tensions, a few priests in the official church publicly acknowledged during the period covered by this report that their appointment had been approved by the Vatican. They suffered no punishment for this public stance, although the Government denied that the Vatican played any role in approving bishops.

There are large Muslim populations in many areas, but government sensitivity to these communities varied widely. Generally speaking, the country'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 the western part of the country. In areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially among the Uighurs in Xinjiang, officials continued to restrict the building of mosques and the training of clergy 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, Muslim teachers, professors, and university students are not allowed to attend mosque or practice religion openly. Female university students and professors are discouraged from wearing headscarves or skirts. Some ethnic Tajiks in Xinjiang cannot attend mosque until over age 30. However, in other areas, particularly in areas populated by the Hui ethnic group, there was substantial mosque construction and renovation and also apparent freedom to worship. After a series of violent incidents, including bombings attributed to Uighur separatists, beginning in 1997, 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 among 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 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.

Xinjiang officials told foreign observers that children under 18 are not permitted to attend religious services in mosques in Xinjiang. However, children were observed attending prayer services at mosques in Beijing and other parts of the country. Fundamentalist Muslim leaders received particularly harsh treatment. In 2000, the authorities began conducting monthly political study sessions for religious personnel; the program reportedly continued during the period covered by this report. In August 2004, scores of Uighur Muslims in Hotan District were detained on charges of engaging in "illegal religious activities." Because of government control of information coming from Xinjiang, such reports were difficult to confirm.

In a growing number of areas, the authorities have displayed increasing tolerance of religious practice by foreigners, provided 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 in a historic Shanghai synagogue. However, officials gave a former synagogue in Harbin to the Russian Orthodox community, causing some tension between the local Russian Orthodox and overseas Jewish groups. Expatriate members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) meet regularly in a number of cities. In 2003, the Church received permission to hold services in a Beijing facility reserved for its use.

The authorities permit officially sanctioned religious organizations to maintain international contacts that do not involve "foreign control." What constitutes "con-

tol" 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, bring in religious materials for personal use, and 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 on college campuses openly profess their faith with minimum interference from the authorities, provided their proselytizing remains discreet. 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.

Some foreign church organizations came under pressure to register with government authorities, and some foreign missionaries whose activities extended beyond the expatriate community were expelled or asked to leave the country. In 2003, the documentary film "The Cross" and the book "Jesus in Beijing" were banned by the Government.

The increase in the number of Christians in the country has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles. Bibles can be purchased at many bookstores and at most officially recognized churches. Many house church members buy their Bibles at such places without incident. A Bible is affordable for most Chinese. The supply of Bibles is adequate in most parts of the country, but members of underground churches complain that the supply and distribution of Bibles in some places, especially rural locations, is inadequate. Individuals cannot order Bibles directly from publishing houses, and house Christians report that purchase of large numbers of Bibles can bring unfavorable attention to the purchaser. 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. However, university-level study of religion is expanding. Some universities mandated a course on religion for students in certain disciplines during the period covered by this report.

Senior government officials claim that the country has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. However, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Education noted after her 2003 visit that Chinese students lack basic internationally recognized rights to religious education. Moreover, some local officials, especially in Xinjiang, prevented children from attending worship services, and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than 18 from entering. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that Christian and Muslim children in Xinjiang were prevented from receiving religious education. 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.

There were at least 76 Government-recognized training institutions for clergy in the 5 main religions, including 54 Catholic and Protestant seminaries, 10 institutes to train imams and Islamic scholars, and dozens of 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. Official religious organizations also administered local Bible schools, monastery-run schools, and other types of training centers. The number of secular universities with a center for the study of theology doubled from 17 in 2002 to 34 in 2005.

The Government has stated that there are 10 colleges conducting Islamic higher education and 2 other Islamic schools in Xinjiang operating with government support. In addition, provincial and local Islamic communities have established numerous Arabic schools and mosque schools. The former concentrate on Arabic language study, while the latter often serve as a stepping stone to apprenticeship as an assistant to an imam or other Muslim religious worker. Some young Muslims study outside of the country in Muslim religious schools.

Religious schools and training institutions for religious leaders other than the officially recognized ones also exist but cannot register as legal institutions. The quality of education at unregistered institutions varies. Some such institutions are closed when they come to the attention of local authorities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, unapproved religious and spiritual groups remained under scrutiny, and in some cases members of such groups were harassed by officials. In some areas, underground Protestant and Catholic groups,

Muslim Uighurs, Tibetan Buddhists, and members of groups that the Government determined to be “cults,” especially the Falun Gong spiritual movement, were subject to government pressure and sometimes suffered abuse.

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 8,051 in 2003, 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 Protestant house churches, the unofficial Roman Catholic Church, and spiritual groups labeled as “cults,” such as the Falun Gong.

According to Falun Gong practitioners in the United States, since 1999 more than 100,000 practitioners have been detained for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhere to the teachings of Falun Gong, or refusing to criticize the organization or its founder. The organization reports that its members have been subject to excessive force, abuse, detention, and torture, and that some of its members, including children, have died in custody. For example, in 2003, Falun Gong practitioner Liu Chengjun died after reportedly being abused in custody in Jilin Province. Some foreign observers estimate that at least half of the 250,000 officially recorded inmates in the country’s reeducation-through-labor camps are Falun Gong adherents. Falun Gong places the number even higher. Hundreds of Falun Gong adherents were also incarcerated in legal education centers, a form of administrative detention, upon completion of their reeducation-through-labor sentences. Government officials denied the existence of such “legal education” centers. 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.

In December 2004, a Beijing attorney sent an open letter to the National People’s Congress highlighting legal abuses in cases involving Falun Gong. The letter focused on the April 2004 detention and subsequent administrative sentencing of Huang Wei of Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province. It described how Falun Gong cases are handled outside normal legal procedures by a special Ministry of Justice office, known as the 610 office. The letter alleged that mistreatment is typical of the ongoing campaign against Falun Gong. After the open letter was published, Huang’s wife disappeared, and her whereabouts remain unknown. The asylum request of a Chinese diplomat and other former government officials allegedly involved in the Government’s campaign against Falun Gong overseas brought additional scrutiny and negative attention to the extra-legal activities of the 610 office, including allegations that it sought out Falun Gong practitioners abroad and forcibly returned them to the country.

In April 2004, dozens of members of the Three Grades of Servants Church, which the Government labels a “cult,” were detained in Heilongjiang Province. Gu Xianggao, allegedly a church member, was beaten to death in a Heilongjiang Province security facility shortly after these detentions. Public security officials paid compensation to Gu’s family.

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 the 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 poorly trained clergy and lack of access to religious texts. Others believe that some individuals may be exploiting religion for personal gain.

Many religious leaders and adherents, including those in official churches, 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 nonjudicial 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. For example, in May 2005, police reportedly detained the China Christian Council-certified pastor of a Linqun County, Anhui Province church and three of his practitioners. In the fall of 2004, local officials in Henan’s Pingyin County raided an official church, detained its pastor, and removed all of its property, down to the chairs and pews.

Authorities continued to harass and detain “house” Christians, especially for attempting to meet in large groups, travel within and outside of China for such meetings, and otherwise hold peaceful religious assemblies. In December 2004, authorities detained Henan Province house Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang, who reportedly organized such meetings. The Government stated he was arrested allegedly for

carrying false documents, but his whereabouts remained unknown. In November 2004, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that the arrest of house church historian Zhang Yinan in September 2003 in Henan Province constituted an unlawful arbitrary detention. Zhang remained in a Pindingshan Country reeducation-through-labor camp, where he reportedly had been beaten. In September 2004, the Government detained Beijing-based house Christian pastor Cai Zhuohua and later charged him with operating an illegal business based on his work publishing underground Christian literature. Separately, the Government detained house Christian Yan Haibing for possessing Christian literature. In August 2004 in Zhejiang Province, the Government convicted Beijing-based house Christian Liu Fenggang and two other house Christians, Xu Yonghai and Zhang Shengqi, on charges of disclosing state secrets and sentenced them to 3, 2, and 1 year in prison, respectively. The Government had detained them in 2003 and had charged them with providing information about abuse of Christians in the country to an overseas Chinese magazine. In June 2004, the government-run Legal Daily newspaper reported that Jiang Zongxiu had died in police custody in Zunyi, Guizhou Province, after being arrested for distributing Bibles. A Legal Daily editorial comment condemned local officials for mistreating Jiang.

Protestant religious retreats were disrupted on many occasions. In June, July, and August 2004, dozens of house Christians were detained for attending separate events in Xinjiang, Sichuan, Henan, and Hubei Provinces. In May 2005, nearly 500 house Christians reportedly were detained at meetings in Jilin Province. The vast majority was released within a few weeks, but up to 100 reportedly remained detained.

Gong Shengliang and several other leaders of the unregistered South China Church reportedly continued to suffer abuse in prison during the period covered by this report. Sentenced to death in 2001 on criminal charges including rape, arson, and assault, Gong Shengliang, Xiu Fuming, and Hu Yong had their sentences reduced to life in prison on retrial in 2002. Li Ying and Gong Bang Kun had their sentences reduced from death to 15 years in prison. Four female church members who signed statements accusing Gong of sexual crimes were rearrested in 2002 and sentenced to 3 years' reeducation-through-labor, reportedly for recanting their accusations against Gong. There were reports that Gong has suffered physical abuse in prison, in part for refusing to abandon his religious beliefs. Elderly church member Chen Jingmao reportedly was abused in a Changing prison for attempting to convert inmates to Christianity. Authorities prevented lawyers for both men from meeting with their clients in jail and from filing appeals on behalf of both men. Government officials and some registered and unregistered Protestants accused the South China Church of being a "cult."

A number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during 2004, prompting Vatican officials to make formal protests. In Hebei Province, traditionally the home of many Catholics, friction between unofficial Catholics, the government-sanctioned Patriotic Church, and some local authorities continued. Hebei authorities reportedly have forced underground priests and believers to choose between joining the official Church or facing punishment such as fines, job loss, periodic detentions, and having their children barred from school. Some Catholic officials have been forced into hiding. Ongoing harassment of underground bishops and priests was reported in recent years, including government surveillance and repeated short detentions. Many of those harassed and detained were over 70 years old.

Numerous detentions of unofficial Catholic clergy were reported, in Hebei Province in particular. In December 2004, the Government detained Bishop Zhao Zhendong of Xuanhua and, in late March 2005, his aide Father Zhao Kexun disappeared. The whereabouts of both men remained unknown and prompted criticism from the Vatican. The Government several times detained underground Bishop Jia Zhiguo for a few days and confined him to his home or church. Authorities reportedly detained other Catholics from the underground church, including Bishop Yao Liang of Xiwanzi, in April just before the death of Pope John Paul II. In August 2004, eight priests and two seminarians were reportedly detained in Quyang County.

Underground Bishop Su Zhimin, who had not been seen since his reported detention in 1997, reportedly was hospitalized in November 2003 in Baoding, Hebei Province. Reports suggest that he had been held in a form of "house arrest." The Government continued to deny having taken "any coercive measures" against him and stated he was "traveling as a missionary." Reliable sources reported that Bishop Su's auxiliary bishop, An Shuxin, as well as Father Han Dingxian of Hebei and Father Li Hongye of Henan remain in detention. Shandong Province Bishop Gao Kexian died in a Chinese prison in August 2004 after having been detained there since

1997. According to several NGOs, a number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during the period covered by this report.

Authorities detained Buddhist leader Yu Tianjian in August 2004 after he planned a rededication ceremony for a temple in Inner Mongolia Autonomous region involving foreign practitioners. The Government said Yu had falsified his credentials as a “living Buddha.” Authorities detained several members of the Buddhist Foundation of America for a short period of time in connection with the temple closure. The whereabouts of Yu Tianjian remained unknown.

Some underground Catholic and unregistered Protestant leaders reported that the Government organized campaigns to compel them to register, resulting in continued and, in some cases, increased pressure to register their congregations. Officials organizing registration campaigns collected the names, addresses, and sometimes the fingerprints of church leaders and worshippers. On some occasions, church officials were detained when they arrived for meetings called by authorities to discuss registration.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, some religious prisoners were released early from prison, including Uighur Muslim Rebiya Kadeer.

Depending on implementation, new legislation governing religious affairs that took effect in March has the potential to improve respect for religious freedom, to enhance legal protection for religious groups, and to strengthen the process of governing religious affairs according to law.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The communities of the five main 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, and, according to press reports, between some members of unregistered church groups. 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. Christian officials reported some friction in rural areas between adherents of folk religions and Christians who view some folk religion practices as idol worship. In general, the majority of the population shows little interest in religious activities beyond visiting temples during festivals or churches on Christmas Eve or Easter. Religious and 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 languages and cultures different 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. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with Chinese leaders, including in his November 2004 meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao at the APEC summit. Secretary Rice discussed religious freedom and attended a church service during her March 2005 visit to Beijing. 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 and release all those serving prison sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials pro-

tested vigorously whenever there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and they requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. At the same time, U.S. officials argued to the country's leaders that freedom of religion can strengthen, not harm, the country.

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 included experts on religion in the country, human rights organizations, and religious groups in the United States.

The Department of State brought a number of Chinese religious leaders and scholars to the United States on international visitor programs to see firsthand the role that religion plays in U.S. society. 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.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued its suspension of the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, which had included religious freedom as a major agenda item. The most recent Dialogue session took place in December 2002, at which the Government committed to invite the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to visit the country. These visits did not occur during the period of this report. In January, USCIRF members visited Hong Kong, a visit authorities from the country publicly criticized.

During the period covered by this report, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor traveled to the country twice to discuss human rights and religious freedom issues with the Government. Staff members of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, including of the Office for International Religious Freedom, also traveled to the country to discuss religious freedom issues. They met with government officials responsible for religion and with clergy or practitioners in official and unofficial religious groups.

U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing continued to protest individual incidents of abuse. On numerous occasions, the Department of State, the Embassy, and the four Consulates in the country 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 Protestant clergy and believers. The Embassy routinely raised reported cases of detention and abuse of religious practitioners with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Administration of Religious Affairs, except from March through November 2004, during which the Government unilaterally implemented a policy of refusing to discuss such cases with Embassy officials in response to U.S. sponsorship of a resolution on Chinese human rights at the March 2004 session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Economic measures in effect against China under the IRFA relate to restriction of exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment (Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, P.L. 101-246).

HONG KONG

The Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitution, provides for freedom of religion, and Hong Kong's Bill of Rights Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination. The Government generally respects 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Six of the largest religious groups have long 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) occupies 422 square miles on more than 200 islands and the mainland, and its population is an estimated 6.9 million. Approximately 43 percent of the population participates in some form of religious practice. The two largest religions are Buddhism and Taoism, which are often celebrated together in the same temple. Hong Kong is home to approximately 700,000 Buddhists or Taoists, 300,000 Protestant Christians, 240,000 Roman Catholics, and 70,000 Muslims. There are small numbers of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews. Many persons also hold Confucian beliefs, although few practice it as a formal religion. Representatives of the spiritual movement Falun Gong state that their practitioners number approximately 500, although HKSAR government officials report the number is lower.

Hong Kong's Protestants have 1,300 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, an estimated 800 Christian churches and chapels, 4 mosques, 1 Hindu temple, 1 Sikh temple, and 1 synagogue. Christian congregations have been known to share churches. Catholics are served by 309 priests, 60 monks, and 519 nuns, all of whom maintain traditional links to the Vatican. More than 286,000 children are enrolled in 320 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 750 schools and nurseries. 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, teach classes there, and develop two-way student exchanges on an ongoing basis. Numerous foreign missionary groups operate in and out of the HKSAR.

A wide range of faiths is represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service. A large number of influential non-Christians have been educated in Christian schools.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law, Hong Kong's 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 Government does not tolerate the abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors. Although a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since July 1, 1997, the HKSAR maintains autonomy in the area of religious freedom under the "one country, two systems" concept that defines its relationship with the mainland. The Government does not recognize a state religion, and a wide range of faiths is represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government and are exempted specifically from the Societies Ordinance, which requires the registration of nongovernmental organizations. Catholics in the HKSAR recognize the Pope as the head of the Roman 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 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 the HKSAR's Chief Executive.

The 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 Government on social welfare projects. For example, the Government often funds the operating costs of schools and hospitals built by religious groups.

The Falun Gong, which considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is registered under the Societies Ordinance, practices freely, and is able to stage public demonstrations. Falun Gong practitioners regularly conducted public protests against the crackdown on fellow practitioners in the PRC. In November 2004, the Court of Appeal overturned the convictions of 16 Falun Gong practitioners who had been fined for obstructing the Central Government Liaison Office during a sit-in protest in 2002. In May 2005, the Court of Final Appeal overturned the convictions of eight Falun Gong practitioners who had been charged with obstructing and assaulting police officers during the same sit-in protest. These rulings affirmed the protection of Hong Kong's fundamental freedoms of assembly, demonstration, and expression under the Basic Law. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Xiang Gong and Yan Xin Qigong, are also registered and practiced freely in the HKSAR.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not have jurisdiction over religious practices in the HKSAR.

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 the HKSAR. In April 2004, the head of Hong Kong's Catholic Diocese, Bishop Joseph Zen, who has been an outspoken critic of both mainland and HKSAR policies, was allowed to travel to the mainland for the first time since 1998.

The spiritual group Falun Gong is generally free to practice, organize, conduct public demonstrations, and 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 government officials claim that the number is lower for both periods. During the period covered by this 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.

The Government has prevented some Falun Gong practitioners from entering the country. During April and May 2004, the Government barred 41 Falun Gong practitioners from entering the SAR for "security reasons." Most of the practitioners were attempting to attend Falun Gong's annual conference at a privately owned facility. Approximately 350 practitioners were granted entry to attend the conference of approximately 700 persons.

In February 2003, the Government barred 80 Taiwanese Falun Gong practitioners from entering Hong Kong to attend an annual conference, although another 380 Taiwanese practitioners in the same group were admitted. The local Falun Gong association, on behalf of four of the overseas practitioners who were denied entry, submitted an application for judicial review of the Immigration Department's decision to refuse entry. In October 2003, the court rejected the application on grounds that the group's chairman was found to have insufficient standing to file the case.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions 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.

Falun Gong claims that it frequently experiences discrimination from private businesses in Hong Kong. In July 2004, a Falun Gong practitioner claimed that the group had submitted 72 applications to rent a government venue for its 2001 and 2002 conferences but was told each time that the venues were already booked. According to the Falun Gong practitioner, the group later discovered that, on the relevant dates, one of the requested venues was empty. In 2004, a private hotel can-

celed a Falun Gong banquet room booking because of the group's "terrorist risk," according to Falun Gong representatives. Falun Gong successfully sued the hotel in small claims court.

While at least two bookstores continue to sell Falun Gong books, Hong Kong's two largest bookstore chains stopped carrying Falun Gong material after the PRC began its crackdown on the group in 1999. In March 2005, the printing company Falun Gong used to publish the Hong Kong edition of its Epoch Times refused to renew the group's contract, which expired in May 2005. Falun Gong alleges the contract was cancelled for political reasons. According to Falun Gong representatives, at least 10 other printing companies had refused to print the paper, which is critical of mainland authorities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

MACAU

The Basic Law, which is the constitution of the Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR), and the Religious Freedom Ordinance provide for freedom of religion and prohibit discrimination on the basis of religious practice, and the Macau SAR 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 amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Macau SAR has an area of 13 square miles, and its population is approximately 461,000. According to 1996 census figures, which are the latest available, 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 1999. There are approximately 100 Muslims in the Macau SAR.

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law, the Macau SAR'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 1999 handover of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (PRC), provides for freedom of religion, privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. The Government generally respects these rights in practice.

There is no state religion.

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

Missionaries are free to conduct missionary activities. More than 37,000 children are enrolled in Catholic schools, and a large number of influential non-Christians have been educated in Christian schools. Religious entities can apply to 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 SAR recognizes the Pope as the head of the Church. A new Coadjutor Bishop for the Macau Diocese was appointed by the Holy See in 2003.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not govern religious practices in the Macau SAR. The Basic Law states, "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."

The Falun Gong, which considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is not registered under the Societies Ordinance. Falun Gong practitioners continued their daily exercises in public parks where, according to the practitioners, the police observed them once or twice a month and checked identification. Falun Gong representatives claim they are often denied entry into Macau and, they claim, the denials are related to sensitive political periods. For example, Macau immigration officials refused to allow a prominent Falun Gong representative from Hong Kong to enter Macau in January 2005 following the death of former PRC Communist Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officers from the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong meet regularly with leaders of all religions and spiritual organizations in Macau.

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, and the Government's February White Paper on "Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China" states, "Organs of self-government in autonomous areas, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and relevant laws, respect and guarantee the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities, and safeguard all legal and normal religious activities of people of ethnic minorities;" however, the Government maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although the authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed activities they viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, such as religious activities venerating the Dalai Lama (which the Chinese Government described as "splittist").

Overall, 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; however, the atmosphere for religious freedom varied from region to region. Conditions were generally more relaxed in Tibetan autonomous areas outside the TAR, with the exception of parts of Sichuan's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Envoys of the Dalai Lama made visits to China for discussions with Chinese officials in 2002, 2003 and 2004. Although in the past there were reports of the deaths of monks and nuns due to maltreatment in prison, there were no known reports during this period; however, Buddhist leaders such as Gendun Choekyi Nyima and Tenzin Deleg remained in detention or prison, and the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama remained in exile. Dozens of monks and nuns continued to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic education." The Government refused free access to Tibetan areas for international observers, tightly controlled observers who were granted access, and tightly controlled publication of information about conditions in Tibet. These restrictions made it impossible to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations.

While there was some friction between Tibetan Buddhists and the growing Muslim Hui population in cities of the Tibetan areas, it was attributable more to economic competition and cultural differences than to religious tensions. The Christian population in the TAR was extremely small. Some converts to Christianity may 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 an area of 871,649 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas was 5,354,540. Most Tibetans practiced Tibetan Buddhism and, to a lesser extent, the traditional Tibetan Bon religion. This held true for many Tibetan government officials and Communist Party members. Bon includes beliefs and ceremonies that practitioners believe predate the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet in the 7th century. Other residents of Tibetan areas include Han Chinese, who practice Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and traditional folk religions; Hui Muslims; Tibetan Muslims; and Christians. There are 4 mosques in the TAR with approximately 3,000 Muslim adherents, as well as a Catholic church with 560 parishioners, which is located in the traditionally Catholic community of Yanjing in the eastern TAR. There may be small numbers of Falun Gong practitioners among the Han Chinese population.

The Government's February White Paper stated that, by the end of 2003, there were 1,700 sites in the TAR for Buddhists to conduct religious activities, and some 46,000 resident monks and nuns. 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 TAR, where the number of monks and nuns was very strictly controlled. According to official figures, Sichuan Province's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is home to 515 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and 38,000 monks and nuns. Informed observers estimate that a total of 60,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns live in Tibetan areas outside the TAR.

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 sought 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 remained wary of Tibetan Buddhism in general and its links to the Dalai Lama, and it maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although the authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed any activities which they viewed as vehicles for political dissent.

This included religious activities that officials perceived as supporting the Dalai Lama or Tibetan independence.

On March 1, 2005, the State Council introduced new religious affairs regulations that superseded the Government's 1994 regulations on the management of religious sites. The regulations' preamble stated that the provisions aim to protect freedom of religious belief, maintain harmony between different religions and society, and regulate religious affairs throughout the country. On January 17, 2005, according to a Chinese Government website, TAR Vice Chairman Jagra Lobsang Tenzin told a meeting of TAR officials that the regulations provided "a legal weapon to resist foreign forces' taking advantage of religion to infiltrate our country."

In September 2004, the Government extended invitations to emissaries of the Dalai Lama to visit Tibetan and other areas of China. The delegation visited Guangdong, Beijing, and Tibetan areas of western Sichuan Province. This marked the third visit of emissaries of the Dalai Lama to China in as many years. On previous visits in 2002 and 2003, Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy, and Kelsang Gyaltzen, the Dalai Lama's Envoy, had traveled to Beijing, Lhasa, Shanghai, and Tibetan areas of Yunnan Province. Additionally, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, visited in 2002, making his first trip to the TAR since leaving in 1959 and subsequently made additional private visits to China. The Government asserted that the door to dialogue and negotiation was open, provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirmed that Tibet and Taiwan were inseparable parts of China.

Since the establishment of the TAR in 1965, the Government asserted it has spent \$36 million (RMB 300 million) for restoration of the TAR's Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, many of which were destroyed before and during the Cultural Revolution. In 2002, the Government undertook a project to restore the TAR's three most prominent cultural sites, the Potala Palace, the Norbulingka (another former residence of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa), and Sakya Monastery (the seat of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism in rural southern TAR).

Despite these and other efforts, many monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution were never rebuilt or repaired, and others remained only partially repaired. The Government stated that funding restoration efforts was done to support the practice of religion, but it also was done in part to promote the development of tourism in Tibetan areas. 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government officials closely associated Buddhist monasteries with pro-independence activism in Tibetan areas of China. Spiritual leaders encountered difficulty reestablishing historical monasteries due to lack of funds, general limitations on monastic education, and denials of government permission to build and operate religious institutions, which officials in some areas contended were a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. The Government stated that there were no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, and that each monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC) decided independently how many monks the monastery could support. Many of these committees were government-controlled, and, in practice, the Government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, particularly in the TAR. The Government had the right to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders; however, the Government did not necessarily exercise this right in practice during the year. Authorities curtailed the traditional practice of sending young boys to monasteries for religious training by means of regulations that forbade monasteries from accepting individuals under the age of 18. Nevertheless, some monasteries continued to admit younger boys, often delaying their formal registration until the age of 18.

The Government continued to oversee the daily operations of major monasteries. The Government, which did not contribute to the monasteries' operating funds, retained management control of monasteries through the DMCs and local religious affairs bureaus. Regulations restricted leadership of many DMCs to "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns and specified that the Government must approve all members of the committees. At some monasteries, government officials were members of the committees.

The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in the TAR and other Tibetan areas remained inadequate; many teachers were in exile, older teachers were not being replaced, and those remaining in Tibetan areas outside the TAR had difficulty securing permission to teach in the TAR. In recent years, DMCs at several large monasteries began to use funds generated by the sales of entrance tickets or donated by pilgrims for purposes other than the support of monks engaged in full-

time religious study. As a result, some “scholar monks” who had formerly been fully supported had to engage in income-generating activities. Some experts were concerned that, as a result, fewer monks would be qualified to serve as teachers in the future. While local government officials’ attempts to attract tourists to religious sites provided some monasteries with extra income, they also deflected time and energy from religious instruction. There were reports of disagreements between monastic leaders and government officials over visitors, vehicle traffic, and culturally inappropriate construction near monastic sites. In July 2004, authorities permitted resumption of the Geshe Lharampa examinations, the highest religious examination in the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, at Lhasa’s Jokhang Temple for the first time in 16 years.

Government officials have stated that the “patriotic education” campaign, which began in 1996 and often consisted of intensive, weeks-long sessions conducted by outside work teams, ended in 2000. However, officials stated openly that monks and nuns undergo political education, also known as “patriotic education,” on a regular basis, generally less than four times a year, but occasionally more frequently, at their religious sites. Since primary responsibility for conducting political education shifted from government officials to monastery leaders, the form, content, and frequency of training at each monastery appeared to vary widely; however, conducting such training remained a requirement and had become a routine part of monastic management.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 2,427 Tibetan new arrivals approached UNHCR in Nepal during 2004, of whom 2,338 were found to be “of concern” and of whom 2,318 were provided with basic assistance; the remaining 89 Tibetan new arrivals departed for India without being registered or processed by UNHCR. Press reports indicate that about 400 TAR residents traveled abroad in 2004. Many Tibetans, particularly those from rural areas, continued to report difficulties obtaining passports. The application process was not transparent, and residents of different Tibetan areas reported obstacles ranging from bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption to denials based on the applicant’s political activities or beliefs. Police in China have stated that passport regulations permit them to deny passports to those whose travel will “harm the national security and national interests.”

Due in part to the difficulties faced by many Tibetans in obtaining passports, and in part to the difficulty many Chinese citizens of Tibetan ethnicity encountered obtaining entry visas for India, it was difficult for Tibetans to travel to India for religious purposes. For example, in January 2005, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that authorities revoked permission for a group of Tibetans from Kardze prefecture to travel to India and Nepal on pilgrimage. In 2003, Tibetans forcibly repatriated to China from Nepal reportedly suffered torture, and their family members pressured by officials for bribes to secure their release. Nevertheless, many Tibetans, including monks and nuns, visited India via third countries and returned to China after temporary stays. Some returned exiles reported that authorities pressured them not to discuss sensitive political issues.

The Karmapa Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism’s Karma Kagyu sect and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, remained in exile following his 1999 flight to India. The Karmapa Lama stated that he fled because of the Government’s controls on his movements and its 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. Visitors to Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Lama, noted that the population of monks remained small and the atmosphere was subdued.

The Government routinely asserted control over the process of identifying and educating reincarnate lamas. For example, Government authorities closely supervised the current Reting Rinpoche, who is seven years old, and his education differed significantly from that of his predecessors.

The Government also strictly restricted contacts between reincarnate lamas and the outside world. For example, young incarnate lama Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa Lama in 1994, lived under government supervision at Nenang Monastery. Foreign delegations have been refused permission to visit him.

Government officials maintained that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama was not illegal. Nevertheless, authorities appeared to view possession of such photos as evidence of separatist sentiment when detaining individuals on political charges. Pictures of the Dalai Lama were not openly displayed in major monasteries and could not be purchased openly in the TAR. In August 2004, TAR Deputy Chairman Wu Jilie told visiting Western journalists that not displaying the Dalai Lama’s photo was the voluntary choice of most TAR residents. In April, the Tibetan government-in-exile reported that police raided the homes of Tibetans living near the TAR border town of Dram and confiscated pictures and speeches of the

Dalai Lama. The Government also continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama. Photos of the “official” Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, were not publicly displayed in most places, most likely because most Tibetans refuse to recognize him as the Panchen Lama.

Approximately 615 Tibetan Buddhist religious figures held positions in local People’s Congresses and committees of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. Nevertheless, the Government continued to insist that Communist Party members and senior employees adhere to the Party’s code of atheism, and routine political training for cadres continued to promote atheism. Government officials confirmed that some Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officers were members of the Communist Party and that religious belief was incompatible with Party membership. This prohibition notwithstanding, some lower level RAB officials practiced Buddhism.

Security was intensified during the Dalai Lama’s birthday, sensitive anniversaries, and festival days in the TAR and in some other Tibetan areas. The prohibition on celebrating the Dalai Lama’s birthday on July 6 continued. In August 2004, some Lhasa residents privately expressed unhappiness with city authorities’ plans to fix the date of the Drepung Shodon festival, which traditionally varied according to the Tibetan lunar calendar, to promote tourism. Residents were reportedly permitted to carry out observances on the traditional date a week later.

Travel restrictions for foreign visitors to and within the TAR were reported during the period covered by this report. The Government tightly controlled visits by foreign officials to religious sites in the TAR, and official foreign delegations had few opportunities to meet monks and nuns in Tibetan areas that were not previously approved by the local authorities.

Following the death of charismatic leader Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog in January 2004, the Serthar Buddhist Study Institute in Western Sichuan’s Serthar County remained under tight government control. Officials restricted access and barred all foreigners from entering the compound. Authorities demolished students’ makeshift shelters and refused requests to build new structures at the site. Officials also pressured monastic leaders to postpone the search for Jigme Phuntsog’s reincarnation.

In July 2004, Tibetan and Chinese intellectuals succeeded in their petition drive to prevent Han Chinese sportsman Zhang Jian from swimming across Lake Namtso in the TAR, which many Tibetan Buddhists hold to be sacred.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government strictly controlled access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and it was difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. While the atmosphere for lay religious practice was less restrictive than in the recent past, 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.

During the period covered by this report, authorities did not respond to international calls for an inquiry into the case of Nyima Dragpa. A monk from Nyitso Monastery in Sichuan’s Kardze Prefecture, Nyima Dragpa died in custody in October 2003, allegedly from injuries sustained during severe beatings.

The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism’s second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltzen Norbu, 15, the boy it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama’s 11th reincarnation. The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, 16, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama in 1995 as the 11th Panchen Lama (when he was 6 years old), and his whereabouts were unknown. Government officials have claimed that the boy is under government supervision, at an undisclosed location, for his own protection 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.

Gyaltzen Norbu traveled June 12–28, 2005, to Sichuan, where he attended religious observances and met with officials. In November 2004, the Associated Press reported that Communist officials met with Buddhist leaders in Qinghai Province and warned that the Buddhist leaders would be punished if they failed to win greater support for Beijing’s policies toward the exiled Dalai Lama and greater acceptance among their followers for Gyaltzen Norbu. In September 2004, as well as in February and March 2005, the Chinese government made efforts to bolster the legitimacy of the boy by publicizing a meeting with President Hu Jintao, arranging an interview with the South China Morning Post, and releasing statements in which the boy both praised the Communist Party and criticized China’s weapons expendi-

tures. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists continued to recognize Gendun Choekyi Nyima as the Panchen Lama.

Officials still have not confirmed the whereabouts of lama Chadrel Rinpoche, rumored to be held under house arrest, and refused requests from the international community to meet with him. The lama had been imprisoned previously for allegedly betraying state secrets while helping the Dalai Lama choose the incarnation of the 11th Panchen Lama. In August 2003, the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) reported that Champa Chung, 56-year-old former assistant of Chadrel Rinpoche, remained in custody after the expiration of his original 4-year prison term in 1999.

In February 2004, police in Lhasa arrested Choeden Rinzen, a monk, for possessing a Tibetan national flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama, according to Radio Free Asia.

According to statistics published in February by the Tibet Information Network (TIN), between 130 and 135 Tibetans were imprisoned on political grounds, approximately two-thirds of whom are monks or nuns. Approximately 55 political prisoners remained in TAR Prison (also known as Drapchi Prison) in Lhasa, most serving sentences on the charge of “counterrevolution,” which was dropped from the Criminal Law in 1997. Chinese authorities have stated that acts previously prosecuted as counterrevolutionary crimes continue to be considered crimes under state security laws. TIN’s analysis indicated that the majority of Tibetan political prisoners were incarcerated in Lhasa and western Sichuan Province. The overall number of political prisoners in Tibetan areas dropped slightly compared to 2004, according to TIN, but rose in Tibetan autonomous areas of Sichuan Province in connection with several high-profile cases. Prison authorities continued to subject imprisoned monks and nuns to torture. In one interview, a nun reported that prison authorities forced her and other inmates to stand on flooded prison floors in winter.

Although Tibetan Buddhists in Tibetan areas outside of the 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. On January 26, authorities commuted prominent religious leader Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche’s two-year suspended death sentence to life in prison. Police arrested the leader in April 2002 for his alleged connection with a series of bombings. Authorities executed Tenzin Deleg’s former associate, Lobsang Dondrub, on January 26, 2003, for his alleged participation. Lobsang Dondrub’s execution occurred despite Chinese Government assurances that they would afford both individuals full due process, and that the national-level Supreme People’s Court would review their sentences.

In 2003, five monks and an unidentified lay artist, all from Ngaba Prefecture in Sichuan Province, received sentences of 1 to 12 years’ imprisonment for alleged separatist activities, including painting a Tibetan national flag, possessing pictures of the Dalai Lama, and distributing materials calling for Tibetan independence.

In September 2004, RFA reported that authorities in Sichuan’s Kardze Prefecture sentenced Tibetan Buddhist monks Chogri and Topden and layman Lobsang Tsering to 3-year jail terms for putting up pro-independence posters. The three were reportedly among a group of 60 individuals detained on July 27 at a ceremony at Chogri Monastery in Draggo County, Kardze. RFA claimed that police beat some of those detained. It was believed that the other 57 individuals initially detained had been released by the end of 2004.

In October 2004, RFA reported that police in Qinghai’s Golog Prefecture shot and killed Tibetan Buddhist religious leader Shetsul after he and other monks demanded that the police pay for medical treatment for injuries suffered while in custody.

In January 2005, the organization Guchusum reported that authorities arrested Phuntsok Tsering, the chant master of Magar Dhargyeling monastery in Lhatse County, TAR, in December 2004 for possessing a portrait of the Dalai Lama and writings on Tibetan nationalism.

In February 2005, RFA reported that authorities had sentenced five Tibetan monks from Dakar Trelzong Monastery in Tsolho Prefecture, Qinghai—Tashi Gyaltzen, Tsultrim Phelgyal, Tsesum Samten, Jhampel Gyatso, and Lobsang Thargyal—to sentences of between 2 and 3 years. Police reportedly arrested the monks in January for publishing politically sensitive poems in a monastery newsletter.

In May 2005, TCHRD reported that authorities sentenced monks Kunchog Tenpa and Tsundue Gyamtso of Taktsang Lhamo Kirti Monastery in Dzoegge County, Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, to three years’ imprisonment. Police arrested the monks in January 2003 for posting pro-independence posters. In July 2003, authorities closed Kirti Monastic School, which is affiliated with Taktsang Lhamo Kirti

Monastery, and summoned its chief patron, Soepa Nagur, to Sichuan's capital city Chengdu. Soepa Nagur's current whereabouts are unknown.

In May 2005, TCHRD reported that authorities sentenced two monks from Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture—Lobsang Khedrub and Gyalpo—to 11-year prison terms. Police reportedly arrested the monks in January and February 2004 for displaying the banned Tibetan national flag.

Other religious figures remained imprisoned during the period covered by this report, including Lhasa orphanage owners Jigme Tenzin and Nyima Choedron, convicted in 2002 of "espionage and endangering state security," Jigme Gyatso, a Ganden Monastery monk serving a 15-year sentence for establishing a pro-independence group, and Ngawang Phuljung, serving a 19-year sentence for leading a group of 10 monks from Drepung Monastery in a 1989 protest.

There were some positive developments regarding the early release of prisoners. In February 2005, the Dui Hua Foundation confirmed the release of two Tibetans named Thatso and Thongtso (who may be nuns) in July 2004 at the conclusion of their three-and-a-half-year sentences for "inciting splittism," later reduced by ten months.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism. The Christian population in Tibetan areas of China is extremely small. Some converts to Christianity may have encountered societal pressure.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas, using both focused external pressure regarding abuses and support for positive trends within the country. 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.

Prior to the January 2005 commutation of Tenzin Delek's death sentence, numerous high-level U.S. officials including the Ambassador and the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor raised concerns about his case in meetings with Chinese officials.

Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination. U.S. officials in Washington, Beijing and Chengdu pressed for the release of Geshe Sonam Phuntsog and other Tibetan Buddhist prisoners, advocated for international access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, and urged the Chinese Government to pursue dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives.

U.S. diplomatic personnel stationed in the country maintain contacts with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in the Tibetan areas, and they traveled regularly to the TAR and other Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom.

U.S. development and exchange programs aim to strengthen Tibetan communities in China and preserve their environmental and cultural heritage. Both are inextricably linked to Tibet's Buddhist religious tradition. The U.S. Mission in China has also promoted religious dialogue through its exchange visitor program, which financed the travel of several prominent scholars of traditional Tibetan culture and religion to the United States.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 5,406 square miles and shares the island of Timor with Indonesia's Nusa Tenggara Timur Province. According to the most recent statistics available from the World Bank, the population of the territory was approximately 925,000. An 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 generally tolerant.

In a United Nations-administered consultation vote in 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 approximately 200,000 persons to flee across the border to West Timor. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) subsequently governed the country from October 1999, until independence in May 2002.

According to a 2003 report from the Asia Foundation, 98 percent of the population is Catholic, 1 percent Protestant, and 1 percent Muslim. Most citizens also retain some vestiges of animistic beliefs and practices, which they have come to regard as more cultural than religious. The number of Protestants and Muslims has declined significantly since September 1999, because these groups were disproportionately represented among supporters of integration with Indonesia and among the Indonesian civil servants assigned to work in the province from other parts of Indonesia, many of whom left the country in 1999.

The Indonesian military forces formerly stationed in the country included a significant number of Protestants, 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 are among those who have remained in West Timor. The Assemblies of God is the largest and most active of the Protestant denominations. The country had a significant Muslim population during the Indonesian occupation, composed mostly of ethnic Malay immigrants from Indonesian islands. There also are a few ethnic Timorese converts to Islam, as well as a small number who descended from Arab Muslims living in the country while it was under Portuguese authority. The latter group was well integrated into society, but ethnic Malay Muslims often were not. Only a few hundred of the latter remain in the country.

Domestic and foreign Catholic and Protestant missionary groups. Missionaries and other religious officials of all religions who come to the country for religious purposes are exempt from paying visa fees.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the Constitution became effective in 2002, the Government continued to enforce some Indonesian laws and UNTAET regulations not yet superseded by the Constitution or national 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 religious convictions. The Government generally protected this right, although the police force and legal system were slow to respond to allegations of criminal acts against members of minority religious groups. Police cadets receive training in equal enforcement of the law and non-discrimination, including religious nondiscrimination.

In October 2003, a law on immigration and asylum went into effect that contains two articles concerning religion. The first requires religious associations to register with the Minister of Interior if most or all of the their members are foreigners; registration entails submitting documents setting forth objectives, statutes or bylaws, 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." Based in part upon this law, immigration authorities established residence and visa fees for foreigners residing in the country. Missionaries and religious figures have been exempted.

There is no official state religion, although Catholicism remains dominant. Most designated public holidays are Catholic holy days, including Good Friday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

The question of religious education in public schools led to one of the most vigorous public debates since independence. In February 2005, the Government shifted religious education from the core curriculum and made it an after-school elective without state funding. Two Catholic bishops issued a pastoral note in response, stating that religious education should be part of the core curriculum, although parents should be able to exempt their children from such instruction. The note also asked the Government not to make major decisions on issues important to the Catholic Church without prior consultation. Government leaders responded that they would engage in dialogue with the Church on religious education only after the new curriculum had been implemented. The bishops responded by organizing a mass demonstration that lasted almost 3 weeks with approximately 10,000 participants, the largest public protest since independence. The standoff ended when the Church and Government signed an accord reinserting religious education into the core curriculum. The agreement also establishes a consultative body consisting of members of the Government and religious organizations. In June 2005, the council had its first meeting to establish the framework for future consultations. Members of other religions were welcomed, and representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, Muslim communities attended.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, incidents of violence against certain religious groups have occurred in the past, and there were several reports of attacks on such groups during the period covered by this report.

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution, and its priests and bishops are accorded the highest respect in local society. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities generally are friendly in the capital of Dili, despite the past association of these groups with the occupying Indonesian forces. Outside of the capital, non-Catholic religious groups sometimes have been viewed with suspicion.

Some Muslim groups at times have been victims of harassment. In December 2004, nearly all remaining ethnic Malay Muslims, who had been residing in Dili's main mosque, were deported for violation of immigration laws. The 300 Malays were given several opportunities to relocate and normalize their residency status, but mosque leaders refused. The group was deported to Indonesian West Timor and reports indicate that many of them returned to their traditional homes in Java and Sumatra. These ethnic Malay Muslims feared integration into the community at large. Their occupation of the Dili mosque created tensions with Muslims of Arab descent. Despite some press reports to the contrary, religion was not at the core of the dispute. Rather, it stemmed chiefly from disagreements within the Muslim community about property rights and from the disputed citizenship claims of long-time ethnic Malay residents.

At times non-Catholic Christian groups also have been harassed. According to Protestant leaders, individuals converting from Catholicism to Protestantism often were subject to harassment by family members and neighbors, and in some cases, clergy and missionaries have been threatened or assaulted. In several instances, village leaders have refused to allow missionaries to proselytize in their villages and

in at least one case a Protestant group was unable to build a chapel because of stiff opposition from neighbors and local officials. Most Protestant leaders report that Catholic Church officials and government authorities have been helpful in resolving disputes and conflicts when they occur.

During 2004, in the Maubara region, local residents reportedly became angry due to the number of persons Brazilian Protestant evangelists had converted from Catholicism. Individuals in the area complained that these evangelists had provided monetary loans and material goods to those who joined their church.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government regularly expresses support to the leaders of the Government for consolidation of constitutional democracy, including respect for basic human rights such as religious freedom.

In addition, the U.S. Government maintained a dialogue with Members of Parliament during their deliberations on legislation affecting religious freedom. The U.S. Government supported 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. In July 2004, the U.S. Embassy hosted an interfaith dialogue during which representatives of all major religious groups met and discussed issues of religious freedom.

FIJI

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country consists of more than 300 islands, 100 of which were inhabited; most of the population is concentrated on the main island of Viti Levu. The country has an area of approximately 6,800 square miles, and its population is an estimated 840,000. Fifty-two percent of the population was Christian, 32 percent Hindu, and 6 percent Muslim. The largest Christian denomination was the Methodist Church, which claimed approximately 218,000 members. Other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church also had significant followings. The Methodist Church was supported by the majority of the country's chiefs and remained influential in the ethnic Fijian community, particularly in rural areas. There also were a small number of active nondenominational Christian groups.

Religion runs largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous persons, who constituted approximately 54 percent of the population, were Christian. Most Indo-Fijians, who constituted an estimated 40 percent of the population, practiced Hinduism, while approximately 20 percent of this community practiced Sunni Islam. In addition, a significant minority of Indo-Fijians were Christian. Other ethnic communities included Chinese and Europeans. Approximately 60 percent of the Chinese community practiced Christianity and 40 percent practiced Confucianism or some form of ancestor worship. The European community was predominantly Christian.

Hindu and Muslim communities maintained a number of active religious and cultural organizations.

Numerous Christian missionary organizations were nationally and regionally active in social welfare, health, and education. Many major Christian denominations, notably the Methodist Church, had missionaries in the country. The missionaries operated numerous religious schools, including colleges, not subsidized by the Government.

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.

Citizens have the right, either individually or collectively, both in public and private, to manifest their religion or beliefs in worship, observance, practice, or teaching. 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, domestic or foreign missionary activity, or other activities of religious organizations.

Major observances of all three predominant religions are celebrated as national holidays, including Christmas, Easter, Diwali, and the Prophet Muhammed'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 somewhat moderated the expression of strong nationalist sympathies endorsed by the previous leadership.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In 2004, incidents of sacrilege increased. Of the 48 incidents reported, most consisted of unidentified persons robbing and desecrating Hindu temples. At least one Member of Parliament specifically cited the incidents as examples of a lack of respect for the Hindu religion, and Christian leaders were encouraged to preach about respecting other religions.

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 somewhat moderated the expression of strong nationalist sympathies endorsed by the Church's previous leadership.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy has disseminated 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." The Government generally respects freedom of religion; however, restrictions continued to exist on some types of religious activity and on unrecognized religions. In addition security forces occasionally tolerated discrimination against and abuse of religious groups by private actors, and the Government at times failed to punish perpetrators.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Most of the population enjoyed a high degree of religious

freedom. However, because the Government recognizes only five major religions, persons of non-recognized faiths frequently experienced official discrimination, often in the context of civil registration of marriages and births or the issuance of identity cards.

Sporadic incidents of possible inter-religious violence continued in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas, but at a significantly lower rate than during the previous reporting period.

Terrorists and members of religious extremist groups carried out attacks during the year, including the September 2004 bombing in front of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta that killed 12 persons and injured more than 100.

During the period covered by this report, Aceh Province remained the only province within the country specifically authorized to implement Islamic law, or Shari'a. Some smaller political parties remained sympathetic to the idea of adopting Shari'a on a nationwide basis, but this proposal generally remained outside mainstream political discourse, and the country's biggest Muslim social organizations opposed the idea.

Some notable advances in inter-religious tolerance and cooperation occurred during the period covered by this report. Government officials continued to work together with Muslim and Christian community leaders to diffuse tensions in conflict areas, particularly in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

An archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, the country covers an area of approximately 1.8 million square miles (approximately 0.7 million square miles landmass) and has a population of approximately 240 million. More than half of the population resides on the island of Java.

The Indonesian Central Statistic Bureau (BPS) conducts a census every 10 years. The latest data available, from 2000, drew on 201,241,999 survey responses; the BPS estimated that the census missed 4.6 million persons. According to the BPS report, 88.2 percent of the population label themselves Muslim, 5.9 percent Protestant, 3.1 percent Catholic, 1.8 percent Hindu, 0.8 percent Buddhist, and 0.2 percent "other," including traditional indigenous religions, other Christian groups, and Judaism. The country's religious composition remains a politically charged issue, and some Christians, Hindus, and members of other minority faiths argue that the census undercounted non-Muslims.

Most Muslims in the country are Sunni, although some follow other branches of Islam, including Shi'a. According to Shi'a headquarters in Jakarta, there are between 1 and 3 million Shi'a practitioners nationwide. In general, the mainstream Muslim community belongs to two orientations: "modernists," who closely adhere to scriptural orthodox theology while embracing modern learning and modern concepts; and predominantly Javanese "traditionalists," who are often followers of charismatic religious scholars and organized around Islamic boarding schools. The leading "modernist" Muslim social organization, Muhammadiyah, claims approximately 30 million followers while the largest "traditionalist" Muslim social organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, claims 40 million.

A number of smaller Islamic organizations cover a broad range of Islamic doctrinal orientations. At one end of the ideological spectrum lies the Islam Liberal Network, which promotes a less literal interpretation of Islamic doctrine. At the other end are groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which advocates a pan-Islamic caliphate, and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), which advocates implementation of Shari'a as a precursor to an Islamic state. Countless other small organizations fall between these poles.

Separate from the country's dominant Sunni Islam population, a small minority of persons subscribe to the Ahmadiyyah interpretation of Islam. This group maintains 242 branches throughout the country. In 1980, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) issued a "fatwa" (a legal opinion or decree issued by an Islamic religious leader) declaring that Ahmadiyyah is not a legitimate form of Islam.

There are also small numbers of other messianic Islamic groups, including the Malaysian-affiliated Darul Arqam, the syncretist Indonesian Jamaah Salamulla group (also called the Salamulla Congregation), and the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Institute (LDII).

Many of the country's Christians reside in the eastern part of the country. Many urban ethnic Chinese citizens adhere to Christian faiths or combine Christianity with Buddhism or Confucianism. Smaller Christian groups include the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Internal migration has altered the demographic makeup of the country over the past 3 decades. It has increased the percentage of Muslims in the predominantly Christian eastern parts of the country. Although government-sponsored transmigration from heavily populated Java and Madura to less populated areas contributed to the increase in the Muslim population in the resettlement areas, no evidence suggests that the Government intended to create a Muslim majority in Christian areas, and most Muslim migration seemed spontaneous. The economic and political consequences of the migration policy contributed to religious conflicts in Maluku and Central Sulawesi and to a lesser extent in Papua.

The Hindu association Parishada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI) estimates that 18 million Hindus live in the country, a figure that far exceeds the government estimate of 3.6 million. Hindus account for almost 90 percent of the population in Bali. Balinese Hinduism has developed various local characteristics that distinguish it from Hinduism as practiced on the Indian subcontinent. Hindu minorities (called "Keharingan") also reside 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 as part of the Government's transmigration program. Hindu groups such as Hare Krishna and followers of the Indian spiritual leader Sai Baba also exist, although in small numbers.

Some indigenous faiths, including the "Naurus" on Seram Island in Maluku Province, incorporate Hindu beliefs. The Naurus combine Hindu and animist beliefs, and many also have adopted some Protestant principles. The Tamil community in Medan represents another important concentration of Hindus. North Sumatra has a Sikh population of more than 10,000, most residing in Pematang Siantar or Medan. The population is part of the North Sumatra Punjabi community, which is otherwise primarily Hindu. There are seven Sikh gurdwaras (Sikh schools) in North Sumatra. The Government registers Sikhs as "Hindus," a practice many Sikhs object to but have been unable to change.

Among the Buddhists, an estimated 60 percent practice the Mahayana school. Theravada followers account for another 30 percent, with the remaining 10 percent belonging to the Tantrayana, Tridharma, Kasogatan, Nichiren, and Maitreya schools. According to the Young Generation of Indonesian Buddhists (GMBI), most adherents live in Java, Bali, Lampung, West Kalimantan, the Riau islands, and Jakarta. Ethnic Chinese make up an estimated 60 percent of the country's Buddhists. Two major Buddhist social organizations exist, the Indonesian Great Sangha Conference (KASI) and the Indonesian Buddhist Council (WALUBI), and many adherents have affiliated themselves with one or the other.

The number of adherents of Confucianism remains unclear, because the national census no longer enables respondents to identify themselves as Confucian. The percentage of practicing Confucians may well have increased after the Government lifted restrictions related to the faith in 2000. This includes the right to celebrate publicly the Chinese New Year. The Supreme Council for Confucian Religion in Indonesia (MATAKIN) estimates that ethnic Chinese make up 95 percent of Confucians with the balance mostly indigenous Javanese. Many Confucians also practice Buddhism and Christianity. MATAKIN has urged the Government to reinsert the Confucian category into the census.

Sizeable populations in Java, Kalimantan, and Papua practice animism and other types of traditional belief systems, termed "Aliran Kepercayaan." Many of those who practice Kepercayaan describe it as more of a meditation-based spiritual path than a religion. Some animists combine their beliefs with one of the government-recognized religions.

Descendants of Iraqi Jews who came to the country more than a century ago to trade spices still live and practice in Surabaya. They have a small synagogue, which is currently inactive. A small Jewish community also exists in Jakarta.

The Baha'i community reported that it had thousands of members in the country, but no reliable figure exists.

Falun Gong representatives claim the group, which considers itself a spiritual organization instead of a religion, has 2,000 to 3,000 followers in the country, nearly half of whom live in Yogyakarta and Bali.

No data exists on the religious affiliations of foreign nationals and immigrants. At least 350 foreign missionaries, primarily Christian, operate in the country. Many work in Papua, Kalimantan, and other areas with large numbers of animists.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides "all persons the right to worship according to their own religion or belief" and states that "the nation is based upon belief in one supreme

God.” The Government generally respects religious freedom; however, some restrictions exist on certain types of religious activity and on unrecognized religions.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs extends official status to five faiths: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Religious organizations other than the five recognized faiths can register with the Government, but only with the Ministry for Culture and Tourism and only as social organizations. This restricts certain religious activities. Unregistered religious groups cannot rent venues to hold services and must find alternative means to practice their faiths.

The Government permits the practice of the indigenous belief system of Kepercayaan, but as a cultural manifestation, not a religion. Followers of “Aliran Kepercayaan” must register with the Ministry of Education’s Department of Education. Some religious minorities whose activities the Government had banned in the past, such as those of the Rosicrucians, may now operate openly.

Despite its overwhelming Muslim majority, the country is not an Islamic state. Over the past 50 years, many Islamic groups sporadically have sought to establish an Islamic state, but the country’s mainstream Muslim community has rejected 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. However, with the loosening of restrictions on freedom of speech and religion that followed the fall of Suharto in 1998, proponents of the “Jakarta Charter” resumed advocacy efforts. Although these efforts were rejected by the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), a body that has the power to change the Constitution, the MPR approved changes to the Constitution that mandated that the Government increase “faith and piety” in education. This decision, seen as a compromise to satisfy Islamist parties, set the scene for an education bill signed into law in 2003 that restricted religious freedom by forcing elementary and secondary school students to undergo religious instruction, sometimes in a religion other than their own. Even before the passage of the bill, students had to choose religious instruction from five types of classes, representing only Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

The Shari’a issue generated some debate and concern during the period covered by this report. However, in most areas, Islamization campaigns that began in 2002 seemed to lose momentum and the Shari’a issue received much less attention at the national level. Regencies that passed local Shari’a ordinances in previous periods took few if any new steps to implement the ordinances. Aceh remained the only province within the country in which the central Government specifically authorized Shari’a. Bulukumba Regency in South Sulawesi launched a bylaw (Perda) in 2003 implementing civil Islamic law in that regency for all Muslims; the regulation does not apply to non-Muslims, nor is it enforced in the Tanjung Bira Beach area, frequented by international tourists. The regulation requires Muslims to wear Islamic dress, have the ability to read the Qur’an, and implement strict anti-alcohol and narcotic measures. The Madura regency of Pamekasan established a local Shari’a implementation committee in 2003 calling for the wearing of Muslim attire by Muslim civil servants and the cessation of public and work activities during the call to prayer.

In 2003, Presidential Decree 11/2003 formally established Shari’a courts in Aceh by renaming the existing religious courts and retaining their infrastructure, jurisdiction, and staff. The judges of these new Shari’a courts stated that they would focus on cases related to the “performance of Islamic duties in daily life,” the subject of the second local regulation approved by the legislature. Sofyan Saleh, head of the Islamic Law Supreme Court, reported that since the tsunami in December 2004, Aceh’s Shari’a courts handled approximately 6,000 cases, two-thirds of which dealt with inheritance or other property related matters.

Religious leaders responsible for drafting and implementing the Shari’a regulations stated that they had no plans to apply criminal sanctions for violations of Shari’a. Islamic law in Aceh, they said, would not provide for strict enforcement of “fiqh” or “hudud,” but rather would codify traditional Acehnese Islamic practice and values such as discipline, honesty, and proper behavior. They claimed enforcement would not depend on the police but rather on public education and societal consensus. However, on June 24, 2005, Civil Shari’a police publicly caned 15 men convicted of gambling in its first implementation of corporal punishment in Aceh. A few thousand spectators watched as police administered the canings. Those who were caned fought the ruling, arguing that, because government officials never publicized the provincial decree on caning, the punishment was illegitimate. They also argued that the punishment was degrading and that the Aceh court system punished them twice by making them serve both the common law sentence and undergo the caning.

Provincial and district governments established Shari'a bureaus to handle public education about the new system, and local Islamic leaders, especially in North Aceh and Pidie, called for greater government promotion of Shari'a as a way to address mounting social ills. Some human rights and women's rights activists complained that implementation of Shari'a focused on superficial issues, such as proper Islamic dress, while ignoring deep-seated moral and social problems, such as corruption.

Other efforts to educate the public about Shari'a included a high-profile public education campaign in the weeks leading up to the fasting month of Ramadan (October 2004), in which police handed out Islamic head coverings to women and encouraged shopkeepers to close during midday prayers. The program lasted only a few weeks. There was no evidence that such rules applied to non-Muslims. Since early 2004, Banda Aceh's main Baiturrahman mosque has continued to operate a "Mosque Brigade" consisting of young men in uniform who patrolled the grounds before and after prayer times to enforce proper dress codes and discourage improper behavior. At times, the police detained people for "public education" if caught wearing improper Islamic dress or dating, but those detained were not arrested or charged with crimes.

The Government requires official religions to comply with Ministry of Religious Affairs and other ministerial directives, such as the Regulation on Building Houses of Worship (1969), the Guidelines for the Propagation of Religion (1978), Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia (1978), and Proselytizing Guidelines (1978).

Of the more than 200 political parties in the country, 24 passed the legal threshold for participation in the 2004 national elections. Of these, seven have direct or partial affiliation with Islam. Five of these are the United Development Party (PPP), the Star and Crescent Party (PBB), the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), the Star of Reform Party (PBR), and the United Nahdlatul Community Party (PPNU). Former leaders of the Muhammadiyah and the NU led nationalist parties, the National Mandate Party (PAN) and the National Awakening Party (PKB) respectively, attempted to draw on grassroots support from their former Islamic social organizations. Of the 24 parties that participated in the 2004 legislative election, only the Prosperous Peace Party (PDS) had an openly Christian orientation. No party representing a religion other than Islam or Christianity competed in the 2004 legislative election. In this election, Islamic parties received approximately 21 percent of the vote, nationalist parties associated with Islamic social organizations earned 18 percent, and the Christian PDS received less than 2 percent of the vote.

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. Organized services and prayer meetings are available for members of each recognized religion. Although every military housing complex must provide a mosque, a Catholic church, a Protestant church, and worship centers or temples for Buddhists and Hindus, smaller compounds rarely offer facilities for all five religions.

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

Religious speeches can take place if delivered to coreligionists and not intended to convert persons of other faiths. However, televised religious programming remains unrestricted, and viewers can watch religious programs offered by any of the recognized faiths. Islamic television preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar claims 80 million viewers. In addition to Muslim programs, ranging from religious instruction to talk shows on family issues, many Christian programs are offered, including ones featuring televangelists as well as programs by and for Buddhists and Hindus.

Some Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist holy days are national holidays. Muslim holy days celebrated include the Ascension of the Prophet, Idul Fitri, Idul Adha, the Muslim New Year, and the Prophet's Birthday. National Christian holy days are Christmas, Good Friday, and the Ascension of Christ. Three other national holidays are the Hindu holiday Nyepi, the Buddhist holiday Waisak, and Chinese New Year, celebrated by Confucians and other Chinese. In Bali, all Hindu holy days are regional holidays, and public servants and others did not work on Saraswati Day, Galungan, and Kuningan.

The Government has a monopoly on organizing the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. In December 2004, the Department of Religious Affairs reduced the number of officials allowed to perform the Hajj because their presence was considered a distraction for Mecca officials that resulted in neglect for non-official pilgrims. The decision freed up enough money to feed pilgrims twice a day during their stay in Medina.

During the period covered by this report, a number of government officials and prominent religious and political leaders interacted with interfaith groups, including the Society for Inter-religious 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 National People's 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.

The first tenet of the country's national ideology, Pancasila, declares belief in one supreme God. Atheism is not recognized, but there were no reports of the repression of atheists.

The Government continued to restrict the construction and expansion of houses of worship. It also maintained a ban on the use of private homes for worship unless the local community approved and a regional office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs provided a license. National law requires that a community agree on the construction of any new house of worship before it is built. Some Protestants complained about the difficulty of obtaining community approval and alleged that in some areas, even when the Muslim community approved a new church, outside activists presented a long list of signatures opposed to the project. In the North Sumatra community of Perbangunan, in Deli Serdang Regency, a Lutheran group bought land in 2003 for a new church, but Islamic militants from outside the area destroyed the partially built church. At the end of the period covered by this report, the congregation had not rebuilt the church.

Many members of minority faiths complained that the Government made it harder for them than for Muslims to build a house of worship. Christian groups complained that the Government closed at least three Jakarta churches unfairly during the period covered by this report. On October 3, 2004, a local Muslim community group, the Karang Tengah Islam Community Foundation (KTICF), with help from members of the Islam Defenders Front (FPI), erected a 2-meter high and 5-meter wide wall that blocked access to Sang Timur Catholic School. The predominantly Muslim local community objected to the school's operation because a Catholic parish routinely held religious ceremonies in the school gymnasium in violation of its operating permit. Following protest against the wall and extensive national publicity, local government workers knocked it down on October 25, 2004, just hours before the arrival of former Indonesian President and Islamic leader Abdurrahman Wahid. Wahid had called for the wall's removal and sought to mediate an end to the dispute.

Muslims routinely reported difficulties in establishing mosques in Muslim-minority areas of Papua, North Sulawesi, and elsewhere.

The civil registration system continued to restrict religious freedom of persons who did not belong to the five officially recognized faiths. Many animists, Baha'is, Confucians, and members of other minority faiths found it impossible to register their marriages or children's births because the Government did not recognize their religion. For example, the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas-HAM) investigated cases in Batam where the registration office refused to register the marriages of Confucian couples. Neither the registration office nor the Mayor has provided Komnas-Ham with an explanation for the refusals. Couples prevented from registering their marriage or the birth of their child in accordance with their faiths must either convert to one of the five recognized faiths or misrepresent themselves as belonging to one of the five. Those who choose not to register their marriages or births risk future difficulties. For example, many children without a birth certificate cannot enroll in school or may not qualify for scholarships. Individuals without birth certificates will not qualify for government jobs.

The Government requires all adult citizens to carry a National Identity Card (KTP), which identifies, among other things, the holder's religion. Members of faiths not recognized by the Government generally cannot obtain KTPs unless they incorrectly identify themselves as a member of a recognized religion. During the period covered by this report, some Civil Registry officials rejected applications submitted by members of unrecognized faiths, while others accepted applications but issued KTPs that inaccurately reflected the applicants' religion. Some animists ended up receiving KTPs that list their religion as Islam. Some Confucians ended up with Buddhist KTPs. Even some Protestants and Catholics ended up receiving KTPs listing them as Muslims. It appears that Civil Registry staff used Islam as the "default" category for many members of unrecognized faiths. Some citizens without a KTP had difficulty finding work. Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and re-

ligious advocacy groups urged the Government to delete the religion category from KTPs.

Men and women of different religions faced serious obstacles to marrying and officially registering their marriages. Such couples had great difficulty finding a religious official willing to perform an interfaith marriage ceremony, and a religious ceremony is required before a marriage can be registered. As a result, some persons converted, sometimes superficially, in order to marry. 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 to have their marriages registered, because in many rural areas the local government could not or would not perform the registration.

On April 23, 2005, during a visit by Chinese President Hu Jintao to the country, followers of Falun Dafa, a group also known as Falun Gong, peacefully demonstrated in front of the Chinese Embassy. The police arrested 12 members of the Falun Dafa. On April 28, 2005, the courts sentenced all 12 to 2 months in jail and 6 months probation for violating a local ordinance by demonstrating beyond a proscribed area.

The Government continued to restrict the religious freedom of certain messianic Islamic groups. An official ban on the activities of the groups Jamaah Salamullah, Ahmadiyyah, and Darul Arqam remained in effect, influenced by a 1980 fatwa by the MUI. However, the Government did not take any action to enforce the ban and thus enabled the groups to stay in operation through the formation of companies that distribute “halal” goods.

Occasionally, hard-line religious groups used pressure, intimidation, or violence against those whose message they found offensive. Despite continued criticism from Islamic hardliners, prominent Islamic intellectual Ulil Abshar-Abdalla maintained his public appeals for a less literal interpretation of Islamic doctrine. Ulil’s Islam Liberal Network (JIL) confronted hardliners in public forums, including seminars. On June 25, 2005, 2,000 people calling themselves the Palu City Muslim Community protested against an opinion article, entitled “Islam, A Failed Religion,” written by a lecturer at the Muhammadiyah University in Palu. The protestors threatened to bring more people to protest and “settle the problem themselves” if the police did not act within 24 hours. The article, among other things, highlighted the spread of corruption in the country. Bowing to pressure from the protestors, the management of Central Sulawesi’s biggest daily, Radar Sulteng, did not publish the newspaper for three days. The police criminally charged the writer for insulting Islam and held him for 5 days before placing him on house arrest.

The Government bans proselytizing, arguing that such activity, especially in areas heavily dominated by members of another religion, could prove disruptive. A joint decree issued by the Ministries of Religion and Home Affairs in 1979 prohibits members of one religion from trying to convert members of other faiths. Three women from the Christian Church of Camp David (GKKD) were arrested in Indramayu, West Java, on May 13, 2005, and charged under Indonesia’s Child Protection Law for allegedly attempting to convert Muslim children to Christianity. The women were charged after community members complained that during the Sunday school program held at their house, free pencil boxes and t-shirts were given to the attendees, including Muslim children. At the end of the period covered by this report, the trial was ongoing.

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 must obtain religious worker visas, which some described as difficult to obtain or extend. The administrative requirements for religious worker visas are more onerous than for other visa categories, requiring not only approval from each office of the Department of Religion from the local to the national level but also statistical information on the number of followers of the religion in the community and a statement confirming that the applicant will work no more than 2 years in the country before replacement by a local citizen. Foreign missionaries granted such visas worked relatively unimpeded. However, many missionaries with a primary focus on development work successfully registered for social visas with the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education.

No restrictions exist on the publication of religious materials or the use of religious symbols. However, the Government bans the dissemination of these materials to persons of other faiths.

At times, the government has placed restrictions on religious speech. On May 8, 2005, Muhammad Yusman Roy, an Islamic school leader, was charged with “despoiling an organized religion,” a crime that carries a maximum punishment of 5 years in jail, for leading prayers at his Islamic boarding school in Arabic followed by an Indonesian translation. Even though prayers are traditionally led only in Arabic, the country’s two largest Muslim associations criticized police for the arrest, claiming Roy did not commit a crime.

The Government did not ban any books because of religious content during the period covered by this report.

Government employees must swear allegiance to the nation and to the national ideology, Pancasila, which includes belief in one supreme God.

The armed forces had no discernable restrictions on religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Ethno-religious representation in the general officer corps appears generally proportional to the religious affiliation of the population at large; Muslims dominate but Christians have representation in the general officer ranks. Although some allege that there is a “glass ceiling” for promotion to the most senior ranks for Christians and other minorities, a Christian serves as the Armed Forces Chief of General Staff. Additionally, a Christian recently served as the Chief of Staff of the Navy, and a Christian has been overall Commander in Chief of the Indonesian Defense Forces. 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 Christians and members of other religious minority groups believe they often are excluded from prime civil service postings and graduate student slots at public universities.

In some municipalities across the country, local leaders applied stricter Islamic practices during the period covered by this report than in the past. For example, in the West Java Regency of Cianjur, a local regulation required all government workers to wear Islamic clothing every Friday. Virtually all women complied with the regulation, and women’s groups, including Women’s Solidarity (Solidaritas Perempuan), said the women were afraid not to comply. Some residents alleged the authorities were meddling in private affairs.

Some residents of the South Sulawesi regencies of Maros, Sinjai, and Gowa, and of the West Java regencies of Indramayu and Garut, had to follow stricter Islamic practices than in the past, such as wearing Muslim clothing or setting aside time for workers to perform group prayers.

As in previous years, during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, many local governments ordered either the closure or a reduction in operating hours of various types of entertainment establishments. The Jakarta decree ordered the month-long closure of non-hotel bars, discos, nightclubs, sauna spas, massage parlors, and venues for live music. However, billiard parlors, karaoke bars, hotel bars, and discos were permitted to operate for up to 4 hours per night. Some members of minority faiths, as well as some Muslims, felt that these orders infringed on their rights. Enforcement of the orders varied.

Divorce was a legal option available to members of all religions, but Muslims who wished to seek divorce generally had to turn to the Islam-based family court system, while non-Muslims obtained a divorce through the national court system. Marriage law for Muslims is based on Shari’a and allows a man to have up to four wives, provided that he is able to provide equally for each of the wives. For a man to take a second, third, or fourth wife, court permission and the consent of the first wife are required. However, women reportedly find it difficult to refuse, and Islamic women’s groups were divided over whether the system should be revised. In divorce cases, women often bear a heavier evidentiary burden than men, especially in the Islam-based family court system. The law requires courts to oblige the former husband to provide alimony or its equivalent, but there is no enforcement mechanism, and divorced women rarely receive such support. In 2004, the Department of Religion conducted internal discussions over a draft Islamic family law revision that aimed to enhance the legal rights of Muslim women in many aspects of marriage and divorce law. After mounting criticism by mainstream and conservative Islamic law experts, Minister of Religious Affairs, M. Maftuh Basyuni, shelved the legislation and ended further discourse on the matter.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although the Government made significant efforts to reduce inter-religious violence, such violence occurred during the period covered by this report. On some occasions, the Government tolerated the abuse of religious freedom by private groups or failed to punish perpetrators.

In 2003, unknown assailants attacked four villages in Poso, killing eight persons. A joint military/police force searched the surrounding forest and killed six suspects, two of them identified as Rachmat Seba and Madong. Because most of the victims were Christians, and because four of the attacks coincided with the first anniversary of the Bali bombings, some speculated that the perpetrators were Islamic extremists. The Government was continuing its investigation and at least 13 suspects remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report.

Some Christians criticized the arrest of Rev. Rinaldy Damanik, a leader of the Christian community in Central Sulawesi. Convicted of weapons possession in 2003, Damanik appealed the decision, but a Central Sulawesi court rejected his appeal that year. Some of Damanik's supporters insisted that he had been framed or that he was persecuted for speaking out for the Christian community. In November 2004, Damanik was released almost a year earlier than his original release date. Reflecting the province's success in conflict resolution efforts, the response from both local Christian and Muslim communities to this release was muted.

Some Christians continued to criticize the prosecutions by Maluku courts of members of the separatist Republic of South Maluku (RMS) and its associated group, the Maluku Sovereignty Front (FKM), whose membership is mainly Christian. However, most observers agree that the Government prosecuted these members for separatist activities and not on religious grounds.

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.

In January 2005, there were erroneous reports that a U.S.-based group had custody of 300 Muslim children orphaned by the December 2004 tsunami and intended to place them in Christian homes as part of a long-term effort to spread Christianity in Aceh. Despite retractions and responsible statements from officials, the reports generated outrage and suspicion of foreign relief operations.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

Terrorists active in the region carried out one major attack in the country during the period covered by this report. The September 2004 suicide attack on the Australian Embassy killed 10 persons and injured approximately 100 more. Although the attack was not targeted at any specific religion, it was the work of operatives of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terror group in collaboration with members of the extremist Negara Islam Indonesia (NII). The JI's agenda includes using violence in an attempt to create an Islamic super-state in Southeast Asia, while the NII aims to implement Islamic law in the country. The Government subsequently arrested six perpetrators of that attack, which was intended to extract revenge on the Australians for their role in suppressing Muslims in the country. At the end of the period covered by this report, the trials were ongoing.

The Government successfully prosecuted more than 20 terrorists and their associates during the period covered by this report, not only members of JI but also of other groups of terrorists and religious extremists. Among those convicted during this period were about a dozen perpetrators of the 2003 Marriott bombing in Jakarta, and a number of Islamic extremists who accidentally blew up a house while practicing bomb assembly in March 2004.

Some Muslims criticized the arrest and prosecution of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the head of the JI terrorist group, who was convicted of immigration violations in 2003. Police rearrested Ba'asyir in April 2004 following the completion of his jail sentence. On March 4, 2005, Ba'asyir was found guilty and sentenced to 30 months in jail for involvement in the 2002 Bali bombings but acquitted of more serious terrorism charges. On May 11, 2005, the country's high court upheld Ba'asyir's conviction. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Supreme Court was reviewing the case.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

NGOs in the country made some progress in improving respect for religious freedom, particularly in the conflict zones of Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas. NGOs worked closely with religious leaders and the local community to promote mutual respect and cooperation. Conflict resolution efforts in former conflict areas of Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas continued to progress during the period covered by this report. Religious leaders and their followers visited each other's religious holiday celebrations and often consulted with each other. Sporadic violence incidents in both areas during the period covered by this report failed to spark broader conflict as it had done in years past.

In December, 2004, a 2-day International Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation, organized jointly with Muhammadiyah, was co-sponsored in Yogyakarta by the Government and the Government of Australia. The President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono opened the dialogue with remarks that terrorism must be regarded as the enemy of all religions and that tolerance building was critical. Major faith leaders from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and East Timor participated in the Dialogue.

In a national celebration of the Chinese New Year, the President stated that the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, including Confucianism, and followers should not hesitate to practice their beliefs. The New Year, which took place in February 2005, was celebrated without incident.

Local police displayed significantly more willingness during the period covered by this report to indict security forces allegedly involved in religious violence. In January 2005, local police arrested a senior police officer for his alleged role in the December 2004 church bombings in Palu. Local police also became more active in making arrests of those allegedly involved in violent incidents. A day after the shooting of a Palu clergywoman in July 2004, the Police Chief held a closed door meeting with local religious leaders and promised that the police would guarantee security for both Christians and Muslims. Since that time, local police have protected local churches and other prayer houses during religious services.

Local courts also began, for the first time, to try some cases of those allegedly responsible for violence in Ambon. Beginning in July 2004, local courts began to prosecute a rash of cases, including 17 trials of predominantly Christian separatists in connection with the April 2004 violence.

The Government has taken more steps to prosecute perpetrators involved in Maluku and Sulawesi conflict. On August 28, 2004, 12 Muslim militants were sentenced for their involvement in the Morowali attack in Central Sulawesi in 2003.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

For many years there has been growing Islamic awareness among the country's Muslims and increasing displays of public piety. The number of businesses associated with Islam, religious schools, and community prayer rooms all grew during the period covered by this report. Muslim-only housing estates attracted more attention. Bookshops did a brisk trade in fiction with Islamic themes, and Qur'anic verses were distributed via cellular phone text messages. At public meetings where the topic for discussion was not related to religion, Muslim speakers increasingly addressed mixed-religion crowds with a traditional Muslim greeting, which was seldom heard at such events in years past and resented by some non-Muslims.

The use of Islamic headscarves grew more popular, particularly among younger women, during the period covered by this report. Motivations were myriad; some wore the headscarf as an act of spiritual submission, while others sought a sense of emancipation or security in a society in which law and order were often weak. Still others did so as part of a global identification with Islam or out of a desire to demonstrate their piety. Islamic banking gained popularity during the period covered by this report but still accounted for only a tiny percentage of depositors.

Economic tensions between local or native peoples, who are predominantly non-Muslim, and more recent migrants, who are predominantly Muslim, were a significant factor in incidents of inter-religious and interethnic violence in the Moluccas, Central Sulawesi, Papua, and Kalimantan.

Violence between Christians and Muslims continued during the period covered by this report. On December 12, 2004, unidentified assailants attacked two churches in Palu, injuring three people. On October 21, a man on a motorcycle fired on a house being used for prayer meetings of a local Protestant congregation. On July 18, 2004, a clergywoman was shot to death in Effata Church in Palu, Central Sulawesi, and four churchgoers were injured.

In Maluku Province, the number of those killed in possibly sectarian incidents fell significantly during the period covered by this report from the almost 50 victims during the previous 12-month period. Maluku has been relatively calm since riots surrounding the commemoration of a separatist group in April 2004 killed dozens of Ambon residents. A few minor explosions occurred in some places, but no casualties were reported. One Pentecostal minister was abducted on a small island near Ambon in early December. Police quickly arrested the kidnapper on December 10, 2004.

Extremists purporting to uphold public morality sometimes attacked cafes and nightclubs that they considered venues for prostitution or that had not made payments to extremist groups. On October 24, 2004, during the holy month of Ramadan, the Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI) attacked the Star Deli bar in Kemang,

South Jakarta. FPI members smashed their way into the bar and destroyed windows, furniture, and alcohol. FPI leader, Jafar Sidik, said the action was taken against those who failed to respect Ramadan. As a result of this incident, police arrested four members of the FPI.

Significantly more attacks on houses of worship were reported during the period covered by this report when compared to the previous one. According to the Indonesian Christian Communication Forum (FKKI), at least 13 churches were attacked: 6 in Jakarta, 3 in West Java, and 1 each in the Moluccas, Central Java, East Java, and Central Sulawesi during the previous period, while at least 26 churches were attacked during this reporting period: 3 in Jakarta, 21 in West Java, and 2 in Central Sulawesi. In June 2004, mobs armed with sticks attacked a church and three shops used for religious services in Pamulang, Tangerang, and Banten Provinces, injuring a minister and damaging pews and windows. Some churches were attacked while services were still in session. Media reports said the churches were targeted because they were established without permission of the local government. The South Jakarta Police arrested four suspects for destruction of property.

In January 2005, at least six Hindu temples in Legian, Tuban, Kuta, and Kedoganan, Bali, were reportedly vandalized. The Bali police made two arrests, but the motive for the crimes remained unknown. One mosque attack was reported during the previous reporting period: the An-Nur mosque in the district of Talake in Ambon. According to Yusuf Elly, a Muslim leader and chairman of the Jazirul Muluk foundation, dozens of Christians burned the mosque on April 26, 2004, after attacking a number of local Muslims with homemade weapons.

On some occasions, publications with controversial religious themes provoked outrage. A popular local rock musician had to change his album cover after receiving complaints from local Muslim groups for using the word "Allah" in Arabic script on the cover. The singer's second band had to change its cover as well after receiving complaints from Hindu groups for publishing a picture of a Hindu god on the cover.

In general Islam in the country remained overwhelmingly tolerant, and had a pluralistic outlook. In 2003, a comprehensive survey asked Muslims whether they felt that Islam should tolerate diverse interpretations of its teachings. A majority, 54 percent, agreed, while 44 percent said there is only one true interpretation of Islam.

Unforced conversions between faiths occur, as allowed by law, but they remain a source of controversy. Some persons converted to marry a person of another faith; others converted in response to religious outreach or social activities organized by religious groups. Some Muslims accused Christian missionaries of using food and micro-credit programs to lure poor Muslims to conversion. Some of those who converted felt compelled not to publicize the event for family and social reasons.

Late in 2004, the Christian-owned leading Medan daily Sinar Indonesia Baru (SIB) ran a caricature suggesting Muslims habitually support corrupt political candidates. The "Si Suar Sair" incident, named after the cartoon character that expressed these views, led to public outrage in parts of the Muslim and Christian communities. North Sumatra police investigated the newspaper's publisher to seek evidence on who was responsible for the caricature. The newspaper's owners apologized for publication of the cartoon.

Sabili, a widely read Islamic magazine, published articles with anti-Semitic statements and themes. It made assertions suggesting the existence of covert conspiratorial "Zionist" activities ongoing in the country.

In 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, animism, or both. 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 the period covered by this report, inter-religious relations were generally good in Papua.

North Sumatra did not experience major inter-religious violence, but some grievances arose among members of different faiths. Some non-Muslims took offense to loud and long prayer calls emanating from mosques and felt the calls invaded their privacy. Muslims complained of pork and dog meat being sold overtly by non-Muslims with signs stating "pork" or "dog" rather than the discreet "B1" and "B2" used in the past. In Medan, Muslims and Christians criticized Hindus for cremating their dead. The illegal gambling industry also caused frictions among religious communities in Medan. Supporters of an Islamist political party carried out a campaign against casinos largely run by Christian and Indonesian Chinese Buddhist mafias. Detractors described the Islamist political party's motivation as a pretense for expressing anti-Christian and anti-Chinese sentiment rather than as a means to support enforcement of anti-gambling laws.

There were reports that faith-based social organizations at times extracted financial contributions from non-Muslim merchants, particularly before major Islamic holidays. Most commonly, these actions relied on social pressure from Muslim-majority communities. Many of those targeted were ethnic Chinese, who generally practiced Buddhism, Christianity, or Confucianism.

Interfaith organizations remained active during the period covered by this report and attracted media coverage. Many of these groups worked together under the umbrella organization True Brotherhood Network (JPS) to seek the repeal of regulations they considered discriminatory and held seminars and discussions on problems related to respect for human rights.

Other private organizations also promoted respect for religious freedom. The Islam Liberal Network (JIL), an alliance of Muslim intellectuals who aim to stimulate debate on Islamic topics, confronted fundamentalism by participating in dialogue via Internet, radio, newspaper, television, and paid visits to institutes of higher learning.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy in Jakarta, the Consulate General in Surabaya, the Embassy's Medan Office, and visiting State Department officials regularly engaged government officials on religious freedom issues and also encouraged officials from other embassies to discuss the subject with the Government. Embassy staff at all levels met frequently with religious leaders and human rights campaigners to promote respect for religious freedom. Embassy staff met regularly with NU and Muhammadiyah officials to clarify U.S. policy and discuss religious tolerance and other issues.

Embassy outreach emphasizes the importance of religious freedom and tolerance in a democratic society. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy arranged eight speaking tours throughout the country for U.S. scholars to address religious tolerance and human rights issues, including a team from Hartford Seminary that spoke at pesantren and universities in Lombok and Yogyakarta on interfaith dialogue. Universitas Islam Negeri and the Liberal Islam Network each received a grant this year to survey attitudes toward religious practice and extremism and determine if they correlate with public opinion critical of the U.S. and its policies.

The Embassy regularly distributed information on religious freedom and religious tolerance in the U.S. through radio, newspaper, and television. It placed 59 programs on 14 television stations, ranging from 13-hour documentaries to 2-minute news features on topics such as Secretary Colin Powell's Iftaar and mosques in America. Books and pamphlets distributed to the public included 152,000 copies of "Muslim Life in America" and 500,000 copies of "Democracy Papers." Approximately 175,000 copies of the American Outline Series were distributed to religiously affiliated organizations at the launch of the translated version. The 5-volume series contains 3 different seminars on "Pluralism in the U.S. and Indonesia." The Embassy also distributed articles to 1200 recipients on topics concerning international religious freedom and religious pluralism in the United States.

During the month of Ramadan, the Embassy made extensive use of the media to convey its key message of U.S. respect for Islam, the important role tolerance plays in a democracy, and shared Indonesian-U.S. values. The Embassy conducted a series of unique public diplomacy activities, including placement of op-ed articles, charity events, and reporting tours in the U.S. These activities resulted in the placement of 93 programs and articles in more than 30 media outlets, reaching tens of millions of Indonesians. One program of note was an original television documentary series televised nationally. This joint project, developed as a TV Co-op between the State Department's Office of Broadcast Services and one of the country's oldest national television networks, Cakrawala Andalas Televisi (ANTV), produced 30 3-minute mini-features on topics concerning Islam in America and profiles of Muslims in the U.S. The stories were broadcasted during the evening news every weekday during Ramadan, minutes before the Maghrib prayer. This program carried the message that Islam has become part of the religious and cultural mix of the United States. ANTV reported very favorable viewer responses to the features. One viewer was cited as saying, "by the footage shown and people depicted, I can see the situation of American Muslims and can feel the positive atmosphere of Muslim life there."

The Embassy sponsored more than 76 religious scholars, religious leaders, human rights activists, community leaders, youth leaders, students, and journalists to travel to the U.S. and participate in programs related to religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Topics included the U.S. Political System and Religious Pluralism, Religious Multiculturalism in a Democratic Society, Inter-religious Dialogue, Conflict Management and Tolerance Promotion, and Educational Development. In addition, the Embassy sent more than 55 pesantren leaders to the U.S.

on an exchange program focused on religious tolerance and civic education. In 2004, 38 students and teachers from private boarding schools attended an international youth leadership program on religious diversity, leadership, and civic education. Through the Youth Exchange and Study program (YES) more than 60 Muslim students are spending 1 year at high schools throughout the United States.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy and the American-Indonesian Exchange Foundation continued to support the country's first graduate-level comparative religion program at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. Six English Language Fellows were based in Islamic institutions of higher education. Ten of the country's institutions of higher education, five of which are Islamic universities, have established "American Corners," which are small program and information centers that provide computers with Internet access and reference materials about American life, including religious topics, and venues for discussion about religious pluralism with mission officers and Embassy-sponsored speakers. Grants from the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs went to two U.S. universities to support conflict resolution and training exchanges and to establish five mediation centers in Islamic institutions of higher learning across the country.

Under the Islam and Civil Society (ICS) program in the country, the United States has continued to maintain one of the most widely heard radio talk shows in Asia, promoting democracy, gender equality, and religious pluralism. This 30-minute call-in weekly radio talk-show entitled "Religion and Tolerance" has reached approximately 3 million people since 2001. For the past three years, the transcripts of the "Religion and Tolerance" radio show have been published weekly by a newspaper syndicate of 100 newspapers in about 50 cities reaching 2 million readers. Listeners from Aceh to Papua have responded enthusiastically to the radio program and the stations on which the program is broadcast often received requests for the talk-show to be extended to an hour. The response from readers of the transcripts has been equally encouraging, and the newspaper syndicate has had to create a new column to accommodate the flood of reader's comments.

The U.S. continued to support the production of inexpensive leaflets written with culturally meaningful perspectives and language, and containing themes of pluralism and democracy. These leaflets are currently distributed in 30 key cities throughout Java, Madura, South and North Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara. The leaflets have been published for 5 years, which is a demonstration of their success. Local communities have also recognized the important impact the flyers have in conflict areas. When inter-religious conflict erupted in Mataram, West Lombok, for example, local police officers requested that the leaflets be distributed more widely. Similar requests have been made by communities in conflict areas such as Poso and Gorontalo.

JAPAN

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 145,884 square miles, and its population is an estimated 127.4 million. It is difficult to determine accurately the percentages of adherents of different religions. While academics estimate that 20 to 30 percent of adults actively practice a particular faith, the Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2003 that 213,826,700 citizens claimed a religion. These numbers are nearly twice Japan's population, since many people claim affiliation with multiple religious organizations, particularly Shintoism and Buddhism. Furthermore, membership statistics kept by the agency are based on self-reports from various religious organizations.

Of citizens claiming a faith, 50.3 percent adhered to Shintoism, 44 percent to Buddhism, 4.7 percent to "other," and 1 percent to Christianity. Shintoism and Buddhism are not mutually exclusive and most Shinto and Buddhist believers follow both faiths. "Other" faiths include "international" religions, such as the Unification

Church, as well as faiths founded in the country, such as Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, and Perfect Liberty. A small segment of the population, predominantly among foreign-born residents, attends Jewish or Islamic services. The Japanese Muslim Association reports there are roughly 100,000 Muslims in the country of whom 10,000 are citizens.

Under the 1951 Religious Corporation Law, the Government recognizes 28 schools of Buddhism. The major Buddhist schools are Tendai, Shingon, Jodo, Zen (Soto and Rinzaï sects), Nichiren, and Nara. In addition to traditional Buddhist orders, there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations, one of the largest being Soka Gakkai, which reports having over 8 million members in the country. The three main schools of Shintoism are Jinja, Kyoha, and Shinkyoha. Catholic and Protestant denominations have modest followings.

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.

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 Government does not require religious groups to register or be 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 Agency for Cultural Affairs listed 183,394 registered religious groups as of December 2003.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In 2002, the courts declared "deprogramming" illegal in a case involving members of Jehovah's Witnesses. However, in 2003, the Supreme Court rejected the Unification Church's appeal in a case involving charges against the victim's family and the kidnapers for kidnapping and "deprogramming." In that case, the court determined that the bases of the appeal were not matters involving a violation of the Constitution. A Unification Church spokesman estimated there were 20 deprogramming cases during the period covered by this report; however, at the families' request, none of the cases were reported to the police.

According to a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, members are free to practice their religion without restriction. Other than one forced confinement in January 2005, which was reported to the police after the fact, there have been no reported deprogramming cases since 2003.

There are no known restrictions on proselytizing.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, an island state of 265 square miles, had 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 included: the Roman Catholic Church (55 percent); Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC), formerly the Congregational Church (37 percent); Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (3 percent); Seventh-day Adventists (2 percent); and the Baha'i Faith (2 percent). Persons with no religious preference accounted for an estimated 5 percent of the population. Members of the Catholic faith were concentrated in the northern islands of the Gilbert Islands group, while Protestants were the majority in the southern Gilbert Islands.

The Mormons, Council of World Missions, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists all had missionaries 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.

There is no state religion. The Government does not favor a particular religion, nor were there separate legal categories for different religions.

Christmas, Easter, and National Gospel Day are official holidays.

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there consequences 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The Constitution provides for “freedom of religious belief”; however, in practice the Government severely restricts religious freedom, including 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 has continued to repress unauthorized religious groups. Religious persons who proselytize or who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating in the People's Republic of China (PRC) were subject to arrest and harsh penalties, according to several unconfirmed reports. Defector reports continued to allege that the regime arrested and executed members of underground Christian churches in prior years. Due to the inaccessibility of the country and inability to gain timely information, the continuation of this activity during the time period covered by this report remains difficult to verify. The Government allowed foreigners to attend government-sponsored religious services.

No information was available on societal attitudes toward religious freedom.

The U.S. Government does not have diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). 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 U.S. Government raised its concerns about the deplorable state of human rights in the country at the Six-Party Talks and other meetings with DPRK officials.

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, defector accounts, and other documentation. While limited in detail, this information is indicative of the religious freedom situation during the period covered by this report.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 47,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at 22.4 million. The number of religious believers is unknown but has been estimated by the Government to be 10,000 Protestants, 10,000 Buddhists, 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. According to a South Korean press report, in 2002 the chairman of the Association of North Korean Catholics stated that the Catholic community in the North had no priests but held weekly prayer services at the Changchung Catholic church in Pyongyang. According to State-controlled media reports, following the passing of Pope John Paul II, a memorial service was held at this church and services were also held at family worship places across the country.

Two Protestant churches under lay leadership—the Pongsu and Chilgok churches—and the Changchung Roman Catholic church have been open since 1988 in Pyongyang. However, these churches are tightly controlled by the State. 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 deaconess. Several foreigners residing in Pyongyang attended Korean-language services at these churches on a regular basis. Some foreigners who have visited the country over the years stated that church activity appears staged, noting that sermons contain both religious and political content supportive of the regime. Foreign legislators attending services in Pyongyang in previous years noted that the congregations all arrived at and departed the services as a group on tour buses. The Government claims that there are more than 500 authorized “house churches.” Although some visitors accept this estimate, the regime has not allowed outsiders the access necessary to confirm such claims. Likewise, outsiders have limited ability to ascertain the level of government control over these groups, but it is generally assumed they are monitored closely.

Hundreds of religious figures visited the country in past years, including papal representatives, the Reverend Billy Graham, and religious delegations from the Republic of Korea (ROK), the United States, and other countries. In June 2005 Venerable Beop Jang, head of the largest Buddhist group in the Republic of Korea and the current chair of the national council on religious leaders in that country, traveled to Pyongyang to mark the fifth anniversary of the Inter-Korean summit. There appear to have been fewer visitors since the Government expelled United Nations

inspectors from nuclear facilities in 2003. Vatican representatives, including Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Vatican Undersecretary for Relations with States, visited the country in 2000 and 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 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 frequently is connected with humanitarian relief, and overseas religious relief organizations have been active in responding to the country's food crisis. An overseas Buddhist group, Join Together Society, continued to operate a factory in the Rajin-Sonbong Free Trade Zone to produce food for pre-school children, which it has done since 1998. 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 believed to be constructing an interfaith religious facility in Pyongyang.

There are an estimated 300 Buddhist temples. Most of the temples are regarded as cultural relics, but religious activity is permitted in some of them. A few Buddhist temples and relics have been renovated or restored in recent years under a broader effort aimed at "preserving the Korean nation's cultural heritage." In November 2004, construction on the main hall of the Singyesa Temple near the Mt. Kumgang Resort was completed. This construction was financed by a South Korean Buddhist group and a branch of the South Korean business Hyundai Asan. A South Korean monk, the first to permanently reside in North Korea, has lived at the temple since construction ended, but was expected to serve primarily as a guide for visiting tourists rather than undertaking pastoral care for Buddhists living in the area. According to DPRK media accounts, renovation of the Ryongthong temple in Kaesong was completed in early 2005. State-controlled press highlighted Buddhist ceremonies on several occasions and related them to the broader theme of Korean unification.

In September 2003, construction reportedly was completed of the Pyongyang Theological Academy, a graduate institution that trains pastors and evangelists. Construction of a Russian Orthodox Church in Pyongyang continued and two men have been sent to Russia to train as priests.

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 severely restricts religious freedom, including discouraging organized religious activities except those controlled 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 and may result in severe punishment.

Although the country's first constitution guaranteed freedom of religion, the Government identified large numbers of religiously active persons as "counterrevolutionaries," both during and immediately after the Korean War of 1950-53. Many of these individuals were subsequently killed or imprisoned in concentration camps. The Government later codified the oppression of religion in the early 1970s through a constitutional revision on "freedom of antireligious activity." The Government began to moderate its religious discrimination policies in the late 1980s, when it launched a campaign highlighting Kim Il Sung's "benevolent politics." As part of this campaign, the regime 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. A constitutional change in

1992 authorized religious gatherings, provided for “the right to build buildings for religious use,” and deleted the clause regarding freedom of antireligious propaganda.

Civic groups and religious organizations in the ROK continue to be active in efforts to promote inter-Korean reconciliation. During the reporting period, Buddhist and Christian groups from the ROK have traveled to the country for discussions and cultural exchanges with their North Korean counterparts and ended the meetings in joint prayer sessions for unification. These exchanges generally receive favorable coverage in the State-controlled media; however, their true effect on religious freedom in the country is unclear.

Several schools for religious education exist in the country. 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 work in the foreign trade sector. In 2000 a Protestant seminary was reopened with assistance from foreign missionary groups. Critics, including at least one foreign sponsor, charged that the Government opened the seminary only to facilitate reception of assistance funds from foreign faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The Federation of Chosun Christianity, a religious group believed to be controlled by the Government, contributed to the curriculum used by the seminary.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Korea Institute for National Unification’s (KINU) 2005 White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea indicates that the regime utilizes authorized religious entities for external propaganda and political purposes and that local citizens are strictly barred from entering their places of worship. Ordinary citizens consider such sites to be primarily “sightseeing spots for foreigners.”

Little is known about the day-to-day life of religious persons in the country. Members of government-controlled 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. There are unconfirmed reports that the nonreligious children of religious believers may be employed at midlevels of the Government. In the past, such individuals suffered broad discrimination with sometimes severe penalties or even imprisonment. Members of underground churches connected to border missionary activity are regarded as subversive elements.

In 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 its concern regarding the authorities’ practice with respect to religious freedom, “in the light of information available to the committee that religious practice is repressed or strongly discouraged.” The committee requested that the Government provide 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.

The KINU 2005 White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea concludes, “North Korea utilizes religious activities only for political and economic goals; namely, to improve its international image, to secure humanitarian assistance from overseas, and to earn foreign currency.”

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. Over the years, defectors have claimed that Christians were imprisoned and tortured for reading the Bible and talking about God.

Over the years, and during this reporting period, defectors have reported testing on human subjects of a variety of chemical and biological agents, including lethal gas. Some accounts have alleged that political or religious detainees were specifically selected for this testing. The DPRK effectively bars outside observers from investigating these reports. However, the collective weight of anecdotal evidence over the years of harsh treatment of unauthorized political or religious activity may lend some credibility to such reports.

There is evidence of the execution of approximately 60–70 individuals in late 2004 and early 2005. Unconfirmed reports allege that the reasons for execution included, in a few cases, contact with missionaries and other foreigners while in China.

In 2002, witnesses testified before the U.S. Congress on the treatment of persons held in prison camps through the early 1990s. 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 regime has reportedly increased repression and persecution of unauthorized religious groups in recent years. Reports indicate that persons engaging in religious proselytizing, those who have ties to overseas evangelical groups operating across the border with China, and, specifically, those repatriated and found to have contacted Christian missionaries outside the country have been arrested and subjected to harsh punishment. This has included imprisonment, prolonged detention without charge, torture, or execution. The Government reportedly was concerned that faith-based South Korean relief and refugee assistance efforts along the northeast border of China have both humanitarian and political goals, including overthrow of the regime. The official Korean Workers Party newspaper has criticized “imperialists and reactionaries” for trying to use ideological and cultural infiltration, including religion, to destroy socialism from within.

One South Korean missionary asserted that the Government was conducting “education sessions” to identify Christian leaders so that they could be apprehended in periodic crackdowns. News reports in recent years indicated that the Government has increased the reward for information on any person doing missionary work in the Chinese border region.

There is no reliable information on the number of religious detainees or prisoners, but there are unconfirmed reports that many people are detained for their religious beliefs and activities. Prison conditions are harsh; starvation and forced labor are common. Visitors to the country have observed prisoners being marched in leg irons, metal collars, or shackles. Sanitation is poor, and prisoners reported having no change of clothing during months of detention.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 fully religious freedom in the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States does not have diplomatic relations with the DPRK and has no official presence there. 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 U.S. Government regularly raises religious freedom concerns about the country in multilateral forums and bilaterally with other governments. U.S. officials urge other countries to condition their bilateral relations with the country on concrete, verifiable, and sustained improvements. During Six-Party Talks held in Beijing in August 2003 and February 2004, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs highlighted U.S. concerns about the deplorable human rights record of the DPRK regime. The Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor testified before the House International Relations Committee in March 2005. The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in 2002. They and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom have repeatedly raised awareness of the deplorable human rights conditions in the country through speeches before U.S. audiences.

In response to serious concerns over the country's human rights record, the U.S. Congress enacted the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004. The Act also establishes the position of Special Envoy on Human Rights in North Korea to coordinate and promote efforts to improve respect for fundamental human rights.

At the 61st session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, the U.S. Government co-sponsored a resolution condemning the DPRK regime for its human rights record. The resolution called on the Government to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments to which it is a party and ensure that humanitarian organizations and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK have free access to the country.

In 2004, the U.S. Department of State provided the National Endowment for Democracy with a \$350,000 grant to improve and expand monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions in the DPRK. The Department of State also provided a grant to Freedom House for a series of conferences and other activities dedicated to pressuring the regime to end its abuses. Radio Free Asia also provides regular Korean-language broadcasting. U.S. Government policy allows U.S. citizens to travel to the country, and a number of churches and religious groups have organized efforts to alleviate suffering caused by shortages of food and medicine.

The DPRK remains subject to the economic restrictions of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment on international trade. Following CPC designation in 2001, these restrictions were also tied to the DPRK's status under the International Religious Freedom Act.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 38,023 square miles and its population is approximately 48 million. According to a 1995 government survey, when the population was an estimated 44,600,000, the numbers of adherents to the predominant religions 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. The percentage of adherents of each faith has remained approximately the same in recent years.

No official figures are available for the number of followers of other religions, which include the Elijah Evangelical Church, the Jesus Morning Star Church, the All People's Holiness Church, Muslims, the Unification Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Buddhism has approximately 25 orders. The Catholic Church has 16 dioceses, including 1 based in Seoul. There are about 83 Protestant denominations, including the Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches, and the Korean Gospel Church Assembly.

Among those practicing a Christian faith, 41.7 percent reported that they attended religious services or rituals at a church or temple at least once a week. Six percent responded that they attended religious services 2 to 3 times per month; 9.4 percent once per month; 6.8 percent once every 2 to 3 months; 26.9 percent once per year; and 9.2 percent did not attend services. Among practicing Buddhists, 1.2 percent responded that they attended religious services.

There are approximately 20 Protestant and 11 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; World Opportunities International, Korea Branch; World Vision; Global Mission Partnership; and Serving In Mission. Among the Catholic missionary groups are the Missionaries of Guadeloupe, the Maryknoll Fathers, 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. 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, and the Government does not subsidize or favor a particular religion.

There are no government-established requirements for religious recognition. The Traditional Temples Preservation Law protects cultural properties including Buddhist temples, which receive some subsidies from the Government for their preservation and upkeep.

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 dialogue 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.

The Government currently provides no exemption or alternative civilian service for those who have a religious objection to duty in the armed forces. According to the Military Manpower Administration (MMA), members of the Jehovah's Witnesses account for almost 99 percent of the 755 imprisoned in 2004 for refusing military service. They are allowed to conduct their own religious services in prison. During the period covered by this report, the issue of conscientious objectors continued to be discussed by the public and in the courts. In August 2004, the Constitutional Court ruled that the country's conscription law does not violate the guarantee of religious freedom. In September 2004, the Seoul District Court reversed an earlier decision by finding that three conscientious objectors were guilty of violating the Military Service Law. Two persons were sentenced to 18-month prison terms and the third person was fined 1 million won.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In June 2004, angry citizens demonstrated at the mosque in Seoul for about a month following the beheading of Korean hostage Kim Sun-il in Iraq. The Government provided security and protection to the mosque but did not interfere with the demonstrations as they were legal assemblies. According to the Institute for Middle East Studies, once the anger over the beheading subsided, Muslims in Korea returned to their normal routine and worshipped freely.

Religious leaders regularly met both privately and under government auspices to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. These meetings were 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials also met regularly with members of various religious communities to discuss issues related to 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.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In most parts of the country, officials respected the constitutionally-guaranteed rights of members of all faiths to worship, but within constraints imposed by the Government. Authorities in some areas continued to display intolerance for minority religious practice, especially by evangelical Christians. 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 Prime Minister's decree on religious practice (Decree 92) is the principle legal instrument defining rules for religious practice. Although this decree has contributed to greater religious tolerance since it was promulgated, authorities used its many conditionalities to restrict some aspects of religious practice. Decree 92 institutionalizes the Government's role as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities. During the period covered by this report, local officials pressured minority Christians to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages. Such cases occurred in Savannakhet, Bolikhamsai and Luang Prabang Provinces and in the Saisomboun Special Zone. There were also two instances wherein a large number of persons were detained and evicted from their villages for their religious faith and several instances in which persons were arrested. Arrests and detentions occurred in Savannakhet, Luang Namtha and Vientiane Provinces. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were five known religious prisoners, all members of the Lao Evangelical Church (LEC), the country's domestic Protestant Christian church.

There were generally amicable relations among the various religious groups, although differences in religious beliefs among villagers led to tensions. Conflicts between ethnic groups sometimes exacerbated religious tensions. The efforts of some Protestant congregations to establish churches independent of the LEC caused strains within the Protestant community.

U.S. Embassy officials and visiting U.S. Government representatives discussed the need for greater religious freedom at all levels of the Government. The Embassy sought to encourage religious tolerance through dialogue. Following on the success of a joint Embassy-Lao Government seminar on religious freedom in 2004, the Embassy organized a second seminar in 2005 to promote religious tolerance with senior provincial and central government officials. The Embassy maintained frequent contact with religious leaders.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 85,000 square miles, and its estimated population is 5.7 million. Almost all ethnic or "lowland" Lao are followers of Theravada Buddhism; however, lowland Lao constitute only about 40-50 percent of the country's population. The remainder of the population belongs to at least 47 distinct ethnic minority groups. Most of these ethnic minorities are practitioners of animism, with beliefs that vary greatly between groups. Animism predominates among some Sino-Thai groups, such as the Thai Dam and Thai Daeng, as well as among Mon-Khmer and Burmo-Tibetan groups. Even among lowland Lao, many pre-Buddhist animistic religious beliefs have been incorporated into Theravada Buddhist practice. Catholics and Protestants constitute approximately 2 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. Most Buddhist men spend some part of their lives as monks 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 500 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, re-

portedly are followers of the Thammayudh school, which places greater emphasis on meditation and discipline.

In Vientiane there are four Mahayana Buddhist pagodas, two serving the ethnic Vietnamese community and two serving the ethnic Chinese community. Buddhist monks from Vietnam, China, and India have visited these pagodas freely to conduct services and 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.

The Roman Catholic Church has 30,000 to 40,000 adherents, many of whom are ethnic Vietnamese, concentrated in major urban centers and surrounding areas along the Mekong River in the central and southern regions of the country. The Catholic Church has an established presence in five of the most populous central and southern provinces, where Catholics are able to worship openly. The Catholic Church's activities have been more circumscribed in the north, although there are signs the government is permitting a revival of the Catholic community there. Three bishops, located in Vientiane, Thakhek, and Pakse, were able to visit Rome to confer with church officials. The Government has not permitted a fourth bishop, assigned to the northern part of the country, to take up his post in Luang Prabang, but did permit him to travel to the north periodically to visit church congregations. 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. An informal Catholic training center in Thakhek is preparing a small number of priests to serve the Catholic community. Several foreign nuns have served temporarily in the Vientiane diocese.

Approximately 300 Protestant congregations conducted services throughout the country for a community that has grown rapidly in the past decade. Church officials estimate Protestants number as many as 100,000, although actual numbers are probably closer to half this figure. The LFNC recognizes two Protestant groups: the LEC, which is the umbrella Protestant church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The LFNC requires all Protestant groups except Adventists to operate under the LEC's overall direction. Many Protestants are members of ethnic Mon-Khmer groups, especially the Khmu in the north and the Brou in the central provinces. Protestants also have expanded rapidly in the Hmong and Yao communities. In urban areas, the LEC has attracted many lowland Lao followers. Most LEC members are concentrated in the 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 fewer than 1,000 followers in Vientiane City and Bokeo Province, and one small Hmong community in Xieng Khouang province.

All approved Christian religious faiths own properties in Vientiane City. In addition the LEC maintains properties in Savannakhet and Pakse. Two informal churches, one English-speaking and one Korean-speaking, serve Vientiane's foreign Protestant community.

Within the LEC, some congregations have sought 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 quietly have sought to register with the LFNC as separate denominations. Two of the more active of these "underground" denominations are Methodists and Jehovah's Witnesses, both of which have unsuccessfully sought official government approval for their activities. Other denominations that have some following in the country include the Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, the Lutherans and the Baptists. Although the Prime Minister's Decree on Religious Practice establishes procedures for new denominations to register, the Government's desire to consolidate religious practice for purposes of control has effectively blocked new registrations.

New guidelines issued by the LFNC in early 2004 require all other Protestant denominations wishing to establish congregations in the country to do so under the aegis of the LEC. In theory denominations not registered with the LFNC are not allowed to practice their faith. These unregistered "independent" churches expressed concerns about being forced to cease activities. Authorities in several provinces, including Xieng Khouang and Luang Prabang, used threats of arrest to force some independent church congregations to return to the LEC, but in other areas authorities allowed independent churches to conduct services without hindrance.

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 Shiite branches of Islam.

The Baha'i faith has more than 1,200 adherents and 4 centers: 2 in Vientiane Municipality, 1 in Vientiane Province, and 1 in Savannakhet. A small number of Baha'is also live in Khammouane Province and in Pakse City. 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 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) quietly engage in missionary activity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, local authorities in particular sometimes violated this right. Article 30 of the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, a fact frequently cited by Lao officials in reference to religious tolerance. Article 9 of the Constitution, though, discourages all acts that create divisions among religions and persons. The Government interprets this clause restrictively, and cites it as a reason for placing restrictions on religious practice, especially those belonging to minority religions. Although official pronouncements accept the existence of different religions, they emphasize the potential to divide, distract, or destabilize. Local and central government officials widely referenced Article 9 as justification for prohibiting such religious activities as proselytizing.

A person arrested or convicted for religious offenses has little protection under the law. 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. All religious groups, including Buddhists, practice their faith in an atmosphere in which application of the law is arbitrary. Certain actions interpreted by officials as threatening may bring harsh punishment. Religious practice is "free" only if practitioners stay within tacitly understood guidelines of what is acceptable to the Government.

The Lao Government typically refuses to acknowledge any wrongdoing on the part of its officials, even in egregious cases of religious persecution. Blame is inevitably attributed to the victims, rather than the persecuting officials. In some cases, officials concoct patently unbelievable explanations for events in order to exonerate local officials.

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 having responsibility for the village or district where the activity occurs.

The rules legitimize many activities that were previously regarded as illegal, such as proselytizing, printing religious material, owning and building houses of worship, and maintaining contact with overseas religious groups. However, in practice the Government is able to impose restrictions on religious activities through the required LFNC approval.

Both the Constitution and Decree 92 assert that religious practice should serve national interests by promoting development and education and instructing believers to be good citizens. The Government presumes both a right and a duty to oversee religious practice at all levels to ensure such practice fills this role in society. In effect this has led the Government to intervene in the activities of minority religious groups, particularly Christians, on the grounds that their practices did not promote national interests or demonstrated disloyalty to the Government.

Although the State is secular in both name and practice, members of governmental institutions are by-and-large followers of Theravada Buddhism, the religion of the majority of the ethnic Lao population. The Government's exemption of Buddhism from many of the Decree 92 restrictions facing other organized religions and its promotion of Buddhism as an element of Laos' cultural and spiritual identity give Theravada Buddhism the status of an unofficial national religion. Many persons regard Buddhism as both an integral part of the national culture and a way of life. The increasing incorporation of Buddhist ritual and ceremony in State functions reflects the elevated status of Buddhism in society.

In some areas where animism predominates among ethnic minority groups, local authorities have actively encouraged those groups to adopt Buddhism and abandon their "backward" beliefs in magic and spirits. The Government discourages animist practices that it regards as outdated, unhealthy, or illegal, such as the practice in

some tribes of infanticide of children born with defects or of keeping the bodies of deceased relatives in homes. Aspects of nontraditional religious beliefs have penetrated Protestant congregations in some areas. In Xieng Khouang Province, a Hmong Christian congregation adopted apocalyptic practices in its worship service. According to provincial authorities, these beliefs led a senior church member to kill his wife late in 2003, predicting her resurrection in three days. Officials from the LFNC later asked the Seventh-day Adventist Church to incorporate this Hmong congregation into its community to bring its doctrines into line with an approved denomination.

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

Muslims in the small Islamic community were able to practice their faith openly, attending the two active mosques. Daily prayers and the weekly Jumaat prayer on Fridays proceeded unobstructed, and all Islamic celebrations were allowed. Muslims were permitted to go on the Hajj. Groups that conduct Tabligh teachings for the faithful come from Thailand once or twice per year. Since 2001, the Government has more closely scrutinized the activities of the small Muslim population but has not interfered with the community's religious activities.

The small Seventh-day Adventist Church, confined to a handful of congregations in Vientiane and in Bokeo Province, reported no government interference in its activities in recent years, and its members appear to be free to practice their faith.

The Baha'i spiritual assemblies in Vientiane and Savannakhet Cities practiced freely, but smaller communities in Khammouane and Savannakhet Provinces faced restrictions from local authorities. The Baha'i assembly in Vientiane also encountered difficulties establishing its ownership of the Baha'i center in Vientiane, where authorities refused to acknowledge the assembly's deed to its property. 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 in Vientiane meets regularly and has sent delegations to the Universal House of Justice in Mount Carmel, which is in Haifa, Israel.

There is no religious instruction in public schools, nor are there any parochial or religiously-affiliated schools operating in the country. Several private pre-schools and English language schools receive support from religious groups abroad, however. 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. Baha'i spiritual assemblies conduct religious training for children as well as for adult members.

The Government observes two religious holidays (Boun That Luang and the end of Buddhist Lent) and the Buddhist New Year in April. It recognizes the popularity and cultural significance of Buddhist festivals, and most senior officials openly attend them. The Government generally permits major religious festivals of all established congregations without hindrance. In the past local officials in some areas have obstructed Christian congregations' observance of religious holidays such as Christmas.

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; evangelical Protestants associated with the LEC continue to be the target of most restrictions. Although not subjected to harassment, the Buddhist hierarchy is observed closely by the Government. The Buddhist Supreme Patriarch, or Sangkarat, maintains close links to the Government. As a result of the Government's decentralization policy that diffuses power to provinces and districts, central government control over the behavior of local officials is weak. Local officials are often unaware of government policies on issues such as religious tolerance due in part to the absence of rule of law coupled with the incomplete dissemination and application of existing laws and regulations. The LFNC at times visited areas where religious persecution had taken place in order to instruct local officials on government policy and regulation. More often, the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department encouraged local or provincial governments to resolve conflicts on their own and in accordance with Decree 92.

The larger urban areas such as Vientiane, Thakhek, Pakse, and Savannakhet cities experienced little or no overt religious abuse, according to religious leaders in those areas. 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. Throughout the country, however, religious practice reportedly 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 in Hin Hoep, Feuang, and Vang Vieng Districts, and approximately 65 LEC churches in Savannakhet and Luang Prabang Provinces. With a more relaxed policy of religious tolerance beginning in 2002, most of these churches were allowed to reopen, particularly in Vientiane and Luang Prabang Provinces. However, officials in several districts of Savannakhet Province did not allow local congregations to reopen 5 or 6 of Savannakhet's approximately 40 churches. Officials in Khamhsan Village continued to refuse permission to the village's LEC congregation to reopen their church, which was closed in 2003. Officials in Muang Feuang district of Vientiane Province continued to deny permission for LEC members to reconstruct a destroyed church in Phone Ngam village. During this reporting period, the Government quietly allowed a handful of new churches to be constructed, including the first Catholic church built in northern Laos since 1975, a Catholic church in Bolikhamsai Province, and four new LEC churches in the Saisomboun Special Zone and Bolikhamsai Province. Vientiane Province authorities also permitted LEC Christians to rebuild a destroyed church in Phone Ngam Village. Several provinces also permitted some Christian congregations to expand or renovate long-standing churches, in contrast to the past policy of denying all such requests.

As many as 200 of the LEC's nearly 300 congregations do not have permanent church structures and conduct worship services in members' homes. Since the promulgation of Decree 92, officials from the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department have taken the view that home churches should be replaced with designated church structures whenever possible. At the same time, village and district-level LFNC offices often refused construction of new churches, and home churches remain the only viable place of worship for most LEC congregations. The LEC encountered difficulties registering new congregations and receiving permission to establish new places of worship or repair existing facilities. The Baha'i congregation in Savannakhet's Dong Bang village was not permitted to construct a spiritual assembly building.

In addition authorities required new denominations to join other religious groups with similar historical antecedents despite clear differences between the groups' beliefs. In March 2004, the LFNC's Order Number 1 required all Protestant groups to become a part of the LEC or the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The order states that no other denominations will be permitted to register, a measure to prevent "disharmony" in the religious community. In at least two provinces, Xieng Khouang and Luang Prabang, authorities used threats of arrest of senior church leaders to force "independent" churches loosely affiliated with the U.S.-based United Methodist Church to return to the LEC. In other areas of the country, however, independent churches were allowed to conduct services without hindrance by local authorities.

The authorities remained suspicious of patrons of religious communities other than Buddhism, especially evangelical Christian groups, in part because these faiths do not share the high degree of direction and incorporation into the government structure that Theravada Buddhism does. Some authorities criticized Christianity as a Western or imperialist "import" into the country. In the past decade, the LEC suffered the brunt of local-level efforts to close churches, arrest church leaders, and force members to renounce their faith. 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 contributed to the Government's suspicion of the Church's activities. Some authorities also interpreted Christian teachings of obedience to God as signifying disloyalty to the Government and Party. The fact that the LEC is comprised mostly members of ethnic Mon-Khmer tribes and the Hmong, two groups that historically have resisted central government control, contributed to the Government's distrust of the LEC.

During the period covered by this report there were no reports of official interference with or denial of permission to hold religious celebrations, nor were there any reports of security forces stopping vehicles during Sunday worship hours to prevent villagers from traveling to attend worship services.

Longstanding restrictions on the Catholic Church's operations in the north left only a handful of small congregations in Sayaboury, Bokeo, and Luang Namtha;

however, there were signs during the year that the Government was easing its control over the Catholic community in the north. The Government permitted more frequent visits by the Bishop of Luang Prabang to the north to conduct services for the scattered Catholic community there, but it continued to restrict his travel. There were 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. During the period covered by this report, authorities allowed Catholics in Ban Pong Vang of Sayaboury Province to construct a new church with assistance from the Papal Nuncio office in Bangkok. This was the first Catholic church built in the north since the creation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975. In the central and southern parts of the country, Catholic congregations practiced 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. Decree 92 specifically authorizes proselytizing by Lao citizens, providing the LFNC approves the activity. In practice, the authorities interpreted proselytizing as an illegal activity that creates divisiveness in society. Authorities sometimes seized religious tracts and teaching material from Lao Christians entering the country from abroad and arrested and expelled foreigners attempting to proselytize.

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. The LFNC did not authorize Christian or Baha'i denominations to print their own religious material, although both groups have been seeking permission to do so for several years. Some believers bring religious material into the country; however, these persons face possible arrest. Because of these restrictions, some approved Christian congregations complained of difficulties in obtaining Bibles and religious material.

The Government generally does not interfere with citizens wishing to travel abroad for short-term religious training; however, it requires that such travelers notify authorities of the purpose of their travel and obtain permission in advance. 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, but on occasion it refused travel permission to persons going abroad for what it regarded as suspect activities.

Identity cards do not specify religion, nor do family "household registers" or passports, two other important forms of identification. On occasion authorities withheld new ID cards or household registers from Christians because of their religious beliefs or threatened to withhold official documentation unless they renounced their faith.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities continued to arrest or detain persons for their religious activities. Most detentions that occurred during the period covered by this report were short, varying from a few days to a few weeks. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were five religious prisoners: two in Oudomsai Province, two in Savannakhet Province, and one in Sayaboury Province. Conditions in prisons were harsh; like other prisoners, religious detainees suffered from inadequate food rations, lack of medical care, and cramped quarters.

In 1999, authorities arrested two members of the Lao Evangelical Church in Oudomsai Province, Nyoht and Thongchanh, and charged them with treason and sedition, although their arrests appear to have been for proselytizing. Nyoht was sentenced to 12 years in prison and Thongchanh to 15 years. The men remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

The largest single detention incident during the reporting period took place in Muang Phin District of Savannakhet Province in late February and early March 2005, when local authorities reportedly detained 24 ethnic Brou Christians associated with the LEC at the district police office for several days in order to force their renunciation of faith. All but two of the men recanted their faith. These two men were still being held at the end of the reporting period. Local officials claimed the two men, Khamchanh and Vanthong, were arrested for trying to sell military ammunition and that their arrest had nothing to do with religion. These authorities also denied that other Brou Christians had been detained and forced to recant their beliefs, in spite of affidavits signed by all of those Brou attesting to their detention and mistreatment.

In late 2004, authorities arrested two ethnic Yao Christians in Long San District of Vientiane Province for proselytizing, according to LEC sources. These two Yao,

a brother and sister, were released in early May 2005 following more than six months' incarceration. Vientiane authorities denied the arrest was for religious reasons and stated that both had been arrested for having refused to pay a debt. Authorities arrested a second pair of ethnic Yao in Luang Namtha Province in August 2004 for proselytizing and held them for several months. Officials in Sayaboury arrested an LEC pastor in June 2005, claiming that he had criticized members of the provincial administration. He remained in detention at the end of the reporting period.

In July and August 2004, authorities in Kasi District, Vientiane Province, detained four LEC Christians for several months. The LEC maintained that they were detained because of their religious activities. Provincial and district authorities claimed the detentions were related to the four men's involvement in a scam to extract money from local villagers.

Forced Religious Conversion

Efforts by local officials to force Christians and (in at least one example) Baha'i members to renounce their faith continued in some areas. In some cases, officials threatened religious minorities with arrest or expulsion from their villages if they did not comply, and on two occasions they acted on these threats. In October 2004, officials in Ban Phiengsavat village of Saisomboun Special Zone reportedly expelled a group of nearly 70 ethnic Khmu Christians after they refused to give up their religious beliefs. The short-notice expulsion forced the families to sell their possessions—including houses and livestock—at prices significantly lower than the market rate. Military trucks transported the families to Sayaboury Province, from where they had moved several years previously. Provincial authorities in Sayaboury refused to accept the group but did negotiate for their resettlement in next-door Luang Prabang Province. Central government authorities later claimed the group had settled “illegally” in Saisomboun and that its expulsion had nothing to do with religion, despite the fact that non-Christians from this same group were allowed to remain in the village.

In February 2005, a second expulsion of Christian villagers took place in Ban Kok Pho Village of Bolikhamsai Province, only a short distance from Ban Phiengsavat. As with the first village, local authorities in Ban Kok Pho told the ethnic Khmu Christians that they would be expelled if they refused to give up their religious beliefs. Authorities forced more than 100 Christians in the village were to liquidate their possessions on short notice before transporting them by military vehicles to Vientiane City, apparently in preparation for sending them on to the northern part of the country. Vientiane City officials intervened in the expulsion, and, following several days' negotiation, Bolikhamsai Province agreed to take the group back. As with Ban Phiengsavat, central government authorities blamed the problems on the Christians, whom they said had settled in Bolikhamsai without permission several years previously. However, officials allowed Ban Kok Pho inhabitants who had renounced their religious faith prior to the expulsion were to remain in the village.

Officials in other communities also threatened Christians with expulsion if they refused to abandon their beliefs, but they did not act on these threats. Christians in Ban Nam Thuam Village of Luang Prabang Province, Yang Soung and Dong Nongkhoun Villages near Savannakhet City, and several villages of Muang Nong and Muang Phin Districts in Savannakhet Province reported expulsion threats from local officials over their religious beliefs.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government's record of respect for religious freedom, particularly toward Christian minorities, continued to be marred by problems at the local level, with incidents of persecution occurring in many provinces. In general, however, the climate of religious tolerance during the last several reporting periods improved.

In its official pronouncements in recent years, the Government called for conciliation and equality between religious faiths. The LFNC continued to instruct local officials on religious tolerance. Officials from the LFNC traveled together with representatives of the LEC to several provinces to promote better understanding between LEC congregations and local officials.

The LEC continued to conduct an active program of public service during this reporting period, providing developmental assistance and organizing social welfare

projects in several areas that had previously experienced religious intolerance. In conjunction with the LFNC, the LEC conducted meetings with provincial officials in Xieng Khouang, Luang Namtha, Oudomsai, Luang Prabang, and Vientiane Provinces and the Saisomboun Special Zone to improve understanding between local officials and LEC communities.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

For the most part, the various religious communities coexist amicably. Society places importance on harmonious relations, and the dominant Buddhist faith generally is tolerant of other religious practices. There is no ecumenical movement to date. Lao 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 disagreements over rights to village resources. Efforts of some congregations to establish churches independent of the LEC or associated with denominations abroad have led to some tensions within the Protestant community. Frictions also have arisen over the refusal of some members of minority religious groups, particularly evangelical Christians, to participate in Buddhist or animist religious ceremonies.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Ambassador cited the promotion of religious freedom as one of her priorities after her arrival in Vientiane. She raised the issue of religious freedom in calls on all major figures in the Government. The Ambassador also spoke directly about religious freedom with provincial governors in her visits to the provinces. In some cases, the Ambassador wrote directly to central government and provincial officials on religious freedom cases. At an Embassy-sponsored seminar on religious freedom, the Ambassador addressed Lao officials on the importance of religious tolerance. Other Embassy officers discussed religious freedom with a range of central and provincial officials.

The Embassy maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Department of Religious Affairs in the LFNC. The Embassy informed the LFNC of specific cases of arrest or harassment. The LFNC in turn used this information to intercede with local officials. Embassy representatives met with all major religious leaders in the country during the period covered by this report. Embassy officials actively encouraged religious freedom despite an environment restricted by government-owned and -controlled media.

For the second year, the LFNC co-hosted with the U.S. Embassy a seminar on religious freedom issues, aimed at senior district and provincial officials as well as officials from the central government in Vientiane. Approximately 90 officials from all the provinces and the central government attended the day-long seminar. Officials from the LFNC and from the U.S.-based Institute for Global Engagement conducted the sessions.

During the period covered by this report, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor visited Laos and met with senior government officials to discuss religious freedom and other human rights issues. Visiting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia-Pacific Christopher Hill also raised religious freedom in his meetings with senior Lao officials. The Embassy supported and encouraged the visit of the president of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), an NGO devoted to promoting religious freedom. During a weeklong visit in February and March, the IGE president traveled to LEC communities in Xieng Khouang Province and met with senior officials in Xieng Khouang and Vientiane Provinces and at the central government level. The Embassy actively encouraged such high-level visits as the most effective tool for eliciting greater respect for religious freedom from the Government. The Embassy also posted on its website material relevant to religious freedom in the country.

MALAYSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government placed some restrictions on this right. Islam is recognized in the Constitution as "the religion of the Federation," but the practice of non-Sunni Islamic beliefs was significantly restricted. Non-Muslims were free to practice their religious beliefs with 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 127,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 25 million. According to 2000 census figures, approximately 60 percent of the population practiced Islam; 19 percent Buddhism; 9 percent Christianity; 6 percent Hinduism; and 3 percent Confucianism, Taoism, and other traditional Chinese religions. The remainder was accounted for by other faiths, including animism, Sikhism, and Baha'i.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, but it also recognizes Islam as the country's religion. In practice, the Government significantly restricts the observance of Islamic beliefs other than Sunni Islam. The Government provides financial support to an Islamic religious establishment composed of a variety of governmental, quasi-governmental, and other institutions, and it indirectly provides more limited funds to non-Islamic communities. State governments impose Islamic religious law on Muslims in some cultural and social matters but generally do not interfere with the religious practices of the non-Muslim community. Prime Minister Abdullah is a proponent of moderate, progressive "Hadhari" Islam. Some observers believe support for this policy contributed to his 2004 election victory over the opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), which advocates a stricter Islamic agenda.

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

Religious organizations must register with the Registrar of Societies or with one of the constituent bodies of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) to qualify for government grants and other benefits.

Public schools generally offered Islamic religious instruction, which is compulsory for Muslim children. Non-Muslim students are required to take nonreligious morals/ethics education. Private schools are free to offer a non-Islamic religious curriculum as an option for non-Muslims. There are no restrictions on home instruction. The Government offered grants only to privately run Muslim religious schools that agreed to allow government supervision and adopted a government-approved curriculum.

In February 2005, the Malaysian Bar Council organized a forum to discuss the creation of an interfaith commission aimed to promote better understanding and respect among the country's religious groups. Several mainstream Islamic groups refused to participate in the forum on the grounds that an interfaith commission would "weaken Islam." The Government subsequently announced that an interfaith commission was not necessary but stated that interfaith dialogue should be encouraged.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In practice, Muslims were not permitted to convert to another religion. In several recent rulings, secular courts ceded jurisdiction to the Islamic courts in matters involving conversion to or from Islam. In July 2004, the Federal Court upheld a 2002 lower court ruling that only the Islamic court is qualified to determine whether a Muslim has become an apostate; in 2000, the Islamic court sentenced four persons to 3-year prison terms for apostasy.

In April 2004, the Kuala Lumpur High Court held that only the Islamic court had jurisdiction over a suit by a non-Muslim mother to nullify the conversion of her two children to Islam without her agreement. The father converted to Islam after he became estranged from his wife and allegedly converted his two infant children to gain custody over them. The MCCBCHS stated the ruling "tramples over the rights of non-Muslim parents." The mother filed an appeal and subsequently fled the country with her children.

Control of mosques is exercised at the state level rather than by the federal government; state religious authorities appoint imams to mosques and provide guidance

on the content of sermons. While practices vary from state to state, both the Government and the opposition PAS have attempted to use mosques in the states they control to deliver politically oriented messages. In recent years, several states controlled by the ruling coalition government 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. Similarly, in states controlled by PAS, some government-affiliated imams have been banned from speaking. In the State of Kelantan, controlled by PAS, the state government reportedly restricts imams affiliated with the Barisan Nasional (the ruling coalition) from speaking in mosques.

The Government opposed what it considered “deviant” interpretations of Islam, maintaining that the deviant groups’ extreme views endanger national security. According to the Islamic Development Department’s website, 56 deviant teachings have been identified and prohibited to Muslims. They include Shi’a, transcendental meditation, and Baha’i teachings, among others. The Government can detain members of groups that do not follow the official Sunni teachings without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA).

The Government continued to monitor the activities of the Shi’a minority.

Proselytizing of Muslims by members of other religions is strictly prohibited, although proselytizing of non-Muslims faces no similar obstacles. The Government restricts the distribution in peninsular Malaysia of Malay-language translations of the Bible, Christian tapes, and other printed materials. In April 2005, the Prime Minister declared that copies of the Malay-language Bible must have the words “Not for Muslims” printed on the front and could be distributed only in churches and Christian bookshops. The distribution of Malay-language Christian materials faces few restrictions in East Malaysia.

On April 25, 2005, two foreign Christian missionaries were arrested after distributing religious materials in front of a mosque in Putrajaya and were charged with “disturbing the peace in a religious manner.” After 10 days, the Government dismissed the charges against the two men and released them.

According to the MCCBCHS, the Government restricted visas for foreign clergy under the age of 40 to inhibit “militant clergy” from entering the country. While representatives of non-Muslim groups did not sit on the immigration committee that approved visa requests, the MCCBCHS was asked for its recommendation. In 2003, the Government decided to allow automatic renewal of professional visit passes to foreign clergy.

The Government prohibits publications that it alleges might incite racial or religious disharmony. In 2004, the Government prohibited Muslims from viewing the movie “The Passion of the Christ” but allowed non-Muslims to view the film at private screenings.

The Government continued to require all Muslim civil servants to attend government-approved religious classes.

State governments have authority over the building of non-Muslim places of worship and the allocation of land for non-Muslim cemeteries. Approvals for building permits sometimes are granted very slowly. After years of complaints by non-Islamic religious organizations about the requirement that the Islamic Council in each state approve construction of non-Islamic religious institutions, the Minister of Housing and Local Government announced in 2003 that such approval no longer would be required. Despite this ruling, some religious groups have complained that state policies and local decisions have continued to restrict the construction of non-Muslim places of worship. Muslim residents of a neighborhood in Kajang objected to the building of a church in a residential area that was predominantly Muslim. In May 2005, the local municipal council determined that the proposed site was designated for residential building and rejected of the church’s application. The construction of a Roman Catholic church was delayed for more than 14 years by the state government of Selangor before construction was completed in 2004. Unregistered houses of worship may be demolished by the state.

In family and religious matters, all Muslims are subject to Shari’a law. According to some women’s rights activists, women were subject to discriminatory interpretations of Shari’a law and inconsistent application of the law from state to state. In January 2005, enforcement officers from the Federal Territories religious department raided a nightclub in Kuala Lumpur and arrested approximately 100 Muslim patrons for “indecent behavior” and for frequenting an establishment that served alcohol. The enforcement officers did not interfere with the non-Muslim patrons, and the charges against the Muslim patrons were subsequently dropped.

In January 2005, the Kelantan state government, controlled by PAS, proposed a dress code for non-Muslim women in supermarkets. Women's groups opposed the measure, claiming the imposition of a dress code was an infringement of gender rights. Also in Kelantan in January, 307 couples were fined for "indecent" acts including holding hands, kissing, and hugging in public.

In the 2004 general elections, PAS was defeated in Terengganu and lost control of the state government. In Kelantan, PAS also lost ground but remained in control of the state legislature by a narrow margin. Many observers interpreted the result as a rejection by voters of the call by PAS for the establishment of an Islamic state and of the strict form of Islam promoted by PAS.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to the Government, no individuals were detained under the ISA for religious reasons during the period covered by this report.

The Government is concerned that "deviationist" teachings could cause divisions among Muslims. Members of such groups can be arrested and detained, with the consent of the Islamic court, to be "rehabilitated" and returned to the "true path of Islam." For example, the Selangor State Religious Department detained 66 members of a "deviationist" group in 2003 and arrested 96 followers of another "deviationist" sect in April 2004. In 2002, the Government revealed that the Malaysian Islamic Development Department "rehabilitated" hundreds of followers from "deviationist" groups after they underwent "counseling" at a faith rehabilitation center in the State of Negeri Sembilan.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor United States 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Non-Muslim ecumenical and interfaith organizations in the country include the MCCBCHS, the Malaysian Council of Churches, and the Christian Federation of Malaysia. Muslim organizations generally do not participate in ecumenical bodies. In 2003, Muslim nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) boycotted a workshop entitled "Toward the Creation of an Inter-religious Council" on grounds that it might lead to an endorsement of apostasy, paving the way for other religions to spread their teachings among Muslims. In 2004, several mainstream Muslim NGOs boycotted and condemned the proposed formation of an interfaith council on grounds that "matters concerning Islam could only be discussed by Muslims."

In October 2003, then Prime Minister Mahathir used anti-Semitic language during his address to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Kuala Lumpur. Mahathir's remarks about Jewish persons at the OIC meeting drew international condemnation. Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, who succeeded Mahathir 2 weeks after the OIC speech, subsequently emphasized religious tolerance towards all faiths.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

In 2003, the U.S. Embassy protested anti-Semitic language used by then Prime Minister Mahathir during his address to the OIC in Kuala Lumpur.

Embassy representatives met and maintained an active dialogue with leaders and representatives of various religious groups. The Embassy also sponsored several major events to discuss these issues. In August 2004, the Embassy co-sponsored with the International Islamic University of Malaysia a major conference on "Islam in the 21st Century" in Kuala Lumpur. Three prominent U.S. speakers participated; one encouraged religious tolerance and openness among Muslims, a theme also raised by the Prime Minister in his speech to open the conference. More than 250 Muslim scholars from dozens of countries attended the conference. The U.S. speakers and the Prime Minister also advocated the empowerment of Muslim women.

The Embassy also sponsored civil society grants and exchange grants for representatives of NGOs working to promote greater religious tolerance, respect for diversity, and human rights and openness in the country.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 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, 25.8 percent; and the Roman Catholic Church, 8.4 percent. Also represented are Bukot Non Jesus (also known as Assembly of God Part Two), 2.8 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 2.1 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 0.9 percent; Full Gospel, 0.7 percent; and the Baha'i Faith, 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, Baptists, and the Salvation Army.

There are foreign missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 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 Roman Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, Assembly of God, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and 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.

Good Friday, Gospel Day, and Christmas are official holidays. These holidays do not negatively affect any religious groups.

There are no criteria for registering religious groups, nor are there consequences for not registering. Missionary groups are allowed to operate freely.

There is no religious education in public schools, and there are no opening or closing prayers during the school day. However, most extracurricular school events begin and end with a non-denominational Christian prayer.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Christianity is a dominant social and cultural force. Governmental and social functions typically 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. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 260 square miles and its population is an estimated 107,000, according to the 2000 census. The country consists of 607 islands spread over a 2,000 mile long swath of ocean; diverse languages and cultures often exist within each of the country's four states. Several Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, are present in every state. Most Protestant groups trace their roots to American Congregationalist missionaries. On the island of Kosrae, the population is approximately 7,800, and 95 percent are Protestants; on Pohnpei, the population of 35,000 is evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics. On Chuuk and Yap, an estimated 60 percent are Catholic and 40 percent are Protestant. Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvation Army, Assemblies of God, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Baha'i Faith also are represented. There is a small group of Buddhists on Pohnpei. Attendance at religious services is generally high; churches are well supported by their congregations and play a significant role in civil society.

Most immigrants are Filipino Catholics who have joined local Catholic churches. The Filipino Iglesia Ni Cristo also has a church in Pohnpei.

In the 1890s, on the island of Pohnpei, intermissionary conflicts and the conversion of clan leaders resulted in religious divisions along clan lines, which persist today. More Protestants live on the western side of the island, while more Catholics live on the eastern side.

Missionaries of many faiths work within the country, including Catholics, Baptists, 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 the establishment of a state religion and governmental restrictions on freedom of religion. There is no state religion.

Christmas and Good Friday are national holidays; they do not adversely affect any particular religion.

Foreign missionary groups operate without hindrance in all four states. There are numerous church-sponsored schools, and religious groups operate radio stations broadcasting religious programming on Pohnpei and Yap.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 as part of its policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy regularly meet with the leaders of religious communities. The Embassy also worked closely with church-related nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in its efforts to promote good governance.

In 2004, two Pacific Island Fund grants were awarded to church-related NGOs. In addition, the Voice of America (VOA) has provided equipment so that a church-owned radio station can relay VOA programming. The Embassy also nominated an individual to participate in an educational visit to the United States that focused on the relationship between religion and community.

MONGOLIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the law limits proselytizing, and some religious groups face bureaucratic harassment or are denied registration.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 604,247 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.75 million. Buddhism and the country's traditions are tied closely, and 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 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 ethnic minority, constituting approximately 4 percent of the population nationwide and 85 percent in the western province, Bayan-Olgii. Kazakhs operate Islamic schools for their children. They sometimes receive financial assistance from religious organizations in Kazakhstan and Turkey.

There is a small number of Christians, including Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, and members of some Protestant denominations. There are no nationwide statistics on the exact number of Christians. The number of citizens who practice Christianity in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, is approximately 24,000, or 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 religious groups that seek to register face bureaucratic harassment. The Constitution explicitly recognizes the separation of church and state.

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 otherwise does not subsidize the Buddhist religion.

Religious groups must register with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs. Groups must provide the following documentation when registering: a letter from the city council or other local authority granting approval to conduct religious services, a letter to the Ministry requesting that the group be registered, a brief description of the organization, the charter of the organization, documentation of the founding of the local group, a list of leaders or officers, brief biographic information on the person who will conduct religious services, and the number of worshippers. The Ulaanbaatar City Council requires similar documentation prior to granting approval to conduct religious services. While the Ministry is responsible for registrations, local assemblies have the authority to approve or deny 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 of this occurring during the period covered by this report. The registration process is decentralized with several layers of bureaucracy. 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. There are 328 registered places of worship in the country, including 191 Buddhist, 127 Christian, 5 Baha'i, and 5 Muslim. During the period covered by this report, 14 new Christian churches were registered in Ulaanbaatar. Some of these organizations had been active and pursuing registration since 1994.

Contacts with coreligionists outside the country are allowed. Legal restrictions on such contacts were abolished in 1993, and human rights sources state that there are no de facto efforts to restrict normal contacts and interchange.

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 by registered religious groups, it limits such activity by forbidding the use of incentives, pressure, or deceptive methods to introduce religion. A Ministry of Education directive bans mixing foreign language or other training with religious teaching or instruction. Monitoring of the ban, particularly in the capital area, is strict. However, there were no reported violations of the ban in recent years. Religious groups 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 Christian 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. During the period covered by this report, 27 new Christian congregations sought to register in Ulaanbaatar, 13 of which were denied registration. City authorities asserted that they withheld registration because in some cases these churches operated illegally prior to seeking registration, by failing to report and pay tax obligations. According to a non-governmental organization (NGO) report, officials stated that the 60 Christian churches registered in Ulaanbaatar were sufficient.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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, because in the past humanitarian assistance was accompanied by proselytizing activity, there has been some friction between Christian missionary groups and citizens. Some conservatives have criticized foreign influences on youth and children, including foreign religions and the use of incentives to attract believers.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials have discussed with authorities specific registration difficulties encountered by Christian groups. 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. Embassy officials also continued to discuss registration requirements with faith-based NGOs.

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

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 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, there has been resistance by some elements of the Nauru Protestant Church (the country's dominant faith) to religious denominations perceived as foreign, in particular to the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 8 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10,000. Christianity is the primary religion. Approximately two-thirds of Christians are Protestant, and the remainder are Roman Catholic. Some of the ethnic Chinese on the island, approximately 8 percent of the population, 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 phosphate industry practice faiths different from those of native-born citizens. Both the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses have won converts among such workers, some of whom hold religious services in their 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.

Officials of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons have been informed that, under the provisions of the Birth, Death, and Marriage Ordinance, their churches must register with the Government to operate in an official capacity, which includes building churches, holding religious services in the multinational facility owned by the NPC, and otherwise practicing their religion. The legal counsel for the Mormons asserted that, while the ordinance in question permits the Government to recognize a religious denomination, it 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 has not responded either to the original request or to follow-up inquiries. Officials of Jehovah’s Witnesses have not submitted a request for registration.

Christmas and Easter are official holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government prevented officials of both Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons from visiting 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 openly practicing their religion and have been discouraged from meeting with native-born citizens. As a justification for such restrictions, the Government has cited concern that outside churches might break up families through their proselytizing activity.

Visiting ministers or missionaries from the Jehovah’s Witnesses have not been permitted to enter the country since 2000. An application for a minister to visit the country is currently pending with the Government.

There is a multi-denominational religious facility for foreign phosphate workers in the area known as Location; however, Mormons and 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, Tuvaluan, 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 Jehovah’s Witnesses.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

of religion. Embassy officials have discussed the importance of religious freedom with ministers in the reformist Scotty government since its return to office in 2004.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with an area of approximately 99,000 square miles, and its population is an estimated four 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. The Maori Christian churches, which integrate Christian tenets with pre-colonial Maori beliefs and include Ratana and Ringatu, experienced significant growth. 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. Hindus and Buddhists each account for approximately 1 percent of the population; other non-Christian religions each account for less than 1 percent.

According to 2001 census data, the following were the numbers and percentages of the population's religious affiliation: No religion, 26.8 percent; Anglican, 15.2 percent; Roman Catholic, 12.7 percent; Presbyterian, 10.9 percent; objected to answering the question, 6.2 percent; did not state affiliation, 5.5 percent; Christian (no more specific identification), 5 percent; Methodist, 3.1 percent; Baptist, 1.3 percent; Ratana (a Maori/Christian group with services in the Maori language), 1.3 percent; Buddhist, 1.1 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 1 percent; and Hindu, 1 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.

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 in full, 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 maintained that 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 325 of the 2,646 primary schools are integrated schools with this designation. As of July 2004, there were 238 Catholic schools and a handful of non-Christian or nonreligious schools, such as Islamic, Hare Krishna, or Rudolph Steiner (a school of spiritual philosophy) integrated into the public school system. 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. ANZAC day is the fourth and only nonreligious holiday that carries similar fines. 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. These businesses include those providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink. Many other businesses are fined if they attempt to operate on these Christian holidays.

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 (IRD), 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.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

In August and September 2004, headstones of Jewish graves were destroyed or desecrated in and around Wellington and Wanganui. In one of the incidents in the Wellington area, a Jewish prayer house was burned down. The Government strongly condemned these actions. In late September 2004, racist letters, some containing pork fragments, were mailed to members of Wellington's Somali community and other Muslims. The heads of the city's Muslim and Jewish communities were quick to proclaim their belief that both the anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim attacks were the work of someone outside their communities who wished to incite tension between the two groups. In October 2004, a person was charged with sending the letters, and a trial was scheduled for July 2005.

The government-funded Human Rights Commission actively promoted tolerance and anti-bias on the issue of religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy regularly includes representatives from a wide range of religious faiths at its sponsored events. The 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

An archipelago of more than 300 islands in the western Pacific Ocean, the country has an area of 188 square miles and its population is approximately 20,000 persons; 70 percent live in the temporary capital, Koror. There are 19 Christian denominations. Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion; approximately 65 percent of the population are members. Other religions with a sizable membership include the Evangelical Church with an estimated 2,000 followers, the Seventh-day Adventists with approximately 1,000 members, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) with an estimated 300 adherents, and Jehovah's Witnesses with approximately 70 members. Modeknegei, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, has approximately 800 adherents. There also is a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims in the country and a primarily Catholic Filipino labor force (approximately 5,000 persons). A large percentage of citizens do not actively practice their faith.

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 many years. A number of groups have missionaries in the country on proselytizing or teaching assignments, including the Baha'i Faith, Roman Catholic Church, Chinese Agriculture Mission, Mormons, Evangelical Church, High Adventure Ministries, the Iglesia Ni Cristo, Jehovah's Witnesses, Korean Church, Korea Presbyterian Church, Pacific Missionary Aviation, Palau Assembly of God, and Seventh-day Adventists. The Seventh-day Adventist and 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 exempt from paying taxes.

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

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. There is government financial support for religious schools that may be requested by rep-

representatives of any religion. 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, activities such as national and state events or public and private graduations are always conducted with a prayer to open the ceremonies.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stemmed from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshi citizens following complaints from employers that workers' religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employing families. A similar ban went into effect in 2001 for citizens of India and Sri Lanka. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there are no impediments to their practice of religion. A Muslim cleric visited the country in December 2004 to worship with the South Asian community. No problems were reported in connection with his visit.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The various religious organizations maintain cordial relations with each other.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with an area of 280,773 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.4 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 Adventist Church. 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 are approximately 40,000 Baha'is, according to Baha'i leadership, and 1,000 to 2,000 Muslims in the country. Many citizens combine their Christian faith with some traditional indigenous practices.

Traditional Christian churches proselytized on the island 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 many movements and faiths that proselytize have representatives in the country. The Summer Institute of Linguistics is an important missionary institution; it translates the New Testament into hundreds of 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"; however, there is no state religion.

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.

Churches built and continue to run most of the country's schools and many of its health services, 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 non-citizens are free to practice their religion, and foreign missionary groups are permitted to proselytize and engage in other missionary activities.

Religious holidays include Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day.

It is the policy of the Department of Education to set aside one 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. Members and leaders of non-Christian religions are not prevalent in the country, and it was not known if non-Christian religions have representatives to teach lessons.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period of the report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

As new missionary movements proliferate, representatives and individuals of some established churches have questioned publicly whether such activity is desirable. 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.

In the past, there were incidents of discrimination against recently arrived Muslim immigrants, but there were no reports of such incidents during the period covered by this report.

The Council of Churches makes the only known effort at interfaith dialogue. 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 has only 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador continued discussions with the Council of Churches and individual church leaders. The Ambassador and Embassy officials met with religious leaders to discuss their role in social issues and continued to 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 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 armed insurgent Muslim group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continued to seek greater autonomy. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government and the MILF maintained a cease-fire and continued their peace dialogue, brokered by the Government of Malaysia. An eventual settlement could include special recognition of Islamic education and Shari'a law, among other provisions sought by some Muslims.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is some ethnic, religious, and cultural discrimination against Muslims by Christians. This, combined with economic disparities, contributed to persistent conflict in certain provinces.

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy actively encouraged the peace process between the Government and MILF, while the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) provided some technical assistance.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 115,831 square miles, and its population is approximately 85 million. More than 81 percent of citizens claim membership in the Roman Catholic Church, according to the 2000 official census data on religious preference. Other Christian denominations together comprise 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 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 significantly undercounted the number of Muslims because security concerns in Muslim-majority areas

of western Mindanao prevented them from making an accurate count. The 2000 census placed the number of Muslims at 3.9 million, or approximately 5 percent of the population, but some Muslim groups claim that Muslims comprise from 8 to 12 percent. Muslims reside principally in Mindanao and nearby islands and are the largest minority religious group.

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

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. Muslims are concentrated in five provinces in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which includes western Mindanao and the islands to the south. The only provinces in which they represent the majority are Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. Large Muslim communities are also located in the Mindanao provinces of Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Norte, Sultan Kudarat, Lanao del Norte, and North Cotabato. Sizable Muslim neighborhoods also can be found in metropolitan Manila on the northern island of Luzon and on the western island of Palawan.

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 corroborated.

Christian missionaries work actively throughout the country, including most parts of western Mindanao, often within Muslim communities. Conversion of Christians to Islam is most typical among overseas foreign workers who have lived and worked in an Islamic country, largely because converting brings social and economic benefits while abroad. Many of these "converts of convenience" remain Muslims upon their return to the country and are known collectively as "Balik Islam" ("return to Islam"). However, there is no nationwide organized Balik Islam movement.

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 in 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) to establish tax-exempt status. For SEC registration, religious groups must submit their articles of faith and existing bylaws. The law does not specify penalties for failure to register with the SEC. To be registered as a nonstock, nonprofit organization, they must meet the basic requirements for corporate registration and must request tax exemption from the BIR law division. The SEC requires existing religious corporations to submit annual financial statements. The BIR gives a 3-year provisional tax exemption to newly established religious corporations. Established nonstock, nonprofit organizations may be fined for late filing of registration with the BIR and nonsubmission 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 economic growth and livelihood projects in predominantly Muslim areas. The OMA's Bureau of Pilgrimage and Endowment administers the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, super-

vises endowment (Awqaf) properties and institutions, and conducts activities for the establishment and maintenance of Islamic centers and Awqaf projects. The Bureau helps coordinate the travel of religious pilgrims 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. In January 2005, 3,366 Filipino Muslims participated in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

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 approximately 7,500 ex-MNLF fighters into the armed forces and police has helped reduce suspicion between Christians and Muslims.

In March 2004, peace advocates, military troops, and government officials declared Jolo municipality in Sulu Province a zone of peace under the UN Multi-Donor Program (UNMDP). Under this declaration, police and military personnel are not allowed to carry firearms within the municipality. Both the MNLF and the MILF agreed to work in previously rebel-controlled areas to help enforce the project, but local observers have noted mixed results in Jolo. Apart from Jolo, other towns in North Cotabato, Maguindanao, and Zamboanga del Norte provinces have been declared peace zones in the past. The peace zones in North Cotabato and Maguindanao have been somewhat successful due to community involvement and a mutual cessation of hostilities between the military and the rebels. The reduction of hostilities has reduced tensions between Christians and Muslims in these areas.

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

By law, public schools must ensure that the religious rights of students are protected. Muslim students are allowed to wear their head coverings (hijab), and Muslim girls are not required to wear shorts during physical education classes.

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

Approximately 14 percent of the school population in Mindanao attends Islamic schools. Estimates of the number of madrassahs (Islamic schools) across the country vary widely; government officials estimate the number at more than 2,000. Of these, more than half are located in the ARMM. To date, 1,140 madrassahs seeking financial assistance from local and foreign donors are registered with the Office on Muslim Affairs, while only 40 are registered with the Department of Education. Most madrassahs do not meet the department's accreditation standards for curricula and adequate facilities. The Madrasa Development Coordinating Committee manages financial assistance to the madrassah system from local and international sources.

In August 2005, the Government was scheduled to begin implementation of its unified curriculum, designed to integrate madrassahs into the national education system. Several private madrassahs have begun training educators to teach math, science, English, and Filipino, in addition to sectarian subjects. The Government hopes to certify Islamic schools that offer a full range of courses in the coming years, allowing their graduates to enter public high schools or colleges. In addition, public elementary schools that have at least 25 Muslim students will begin offering Arabic language instruction and classes on Islamic values.

In line with the Government's anti-terrorism campaign, the President ordered in April 2004 the creation of a special Muslim police unit tasked to handle cases involving the arrest and investigation of Muslims. Some Muslims disagreed with the creation of the police group and branded it as a ploy to pit Muslims against Muslims, but the Government claimed it would ensure that the rights of Muslims are protected.

The Government's National Ecumenical Consultative Committee (NECCOM) fosters interfaith dialogue among major religious groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, Islam, Iglesia ni Cristo, the Philippine Independent Church (Aglipayan), and Protestant denominations. The Protestant organizations represented in the NECCOM are 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.

Officially recognized holy days include Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, All Saints' Day, and Christmas Day. Each year since 2002, the President has issued

a proclamation declaring the Feast of the end of Ramadan, domestically known as Eid al-Fitr, a special nonworking holiday nationwide.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government does not ban or discourage specific religions or religious factions. Muslims, who are concentrated in many of the most impoverished provinces, 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 development.

Despite such programs, intermittent government efforts to integrate Muslims better 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 they cite the lack of proportional Muslim representation in national government institutions. There are currently 10 Muslim district representatives and 2 Muslim party list representatives in the House of Representatives out of a total of 236 members.

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. As of May 2004, there were 32 incumbent judges and 19 vacancies in the Shari'a Circuit Court and no incumbent judges and 5 vacancies 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.

A 2004 police proposal for an identification system for Muslims alone was abandoned in favor of a national identification system. On April 13, 2005, the President issued an executive order requiring government employees to register for the new identification cards, which replaced a variety of existing government identification cards. The proposal gained support from local officials, including those in the ARMM.

In 2001, the Philippine Military Academy (PMA) announced plans to construct a mosque for Muslim cadets. However, at the end of this reporting period the mosque had not been erected.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 14, 2005, inmates revolted at the Special Intensive Care Area (SICA) of the Metro Manila Rehabilitation Center in Camp Bagong Diwa, Taguig. Several prisoners killed a guard, armed themselves and attempted to escape, but they were contained within the facility. After a 27-hour standoff, police and military units assaulted the prison, resulting in the deaths of 22 inmates and a police officer. Several notorious regional commanders of the terrorist organization Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) were among the dead inmates. They were on or awaiting trial on murder and kidnapping charges. Muslim leaders and some human rights groups accused security forces of executing the prisoners during the raid. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Philippine Commission on Human Rights was investigating the deaths of the inmates.

On January 7, 2005, following the creation in 2004 of special Muslim police units, members of the unit in the Western Police District raided the Islamic Information Center in Manila and detained 17 suspected militants, including 3 women. Police asserted the group was planning a bomb attack on the Catholic celebration of the feast of the Black Nazarene in Quiapo, Manila, on January 9, 2005. However, police released 15 of the suspects shortly after their arrest, due to lack of evidence. Leaders from the Islamic Information Center, along with Muslim politicians, demanded an apology from the police, citing religious discrimination.

In April 2004, following a series of illegal raids of Muslim communities and arrests reportedly made without warrants, some 4,000 Muslims held a prayer vigil and protested in Metro Manila and accused the Government of targeting Muslim communities in its hunt for terrorists. The Ulama League of the Philippines, an organization of Muslim religious groups, denounced the military's report describing an Arabic teacher and two city hall workers as suspected ASG members and called for the establishment of sufficient evidence before linking Muslims with terror groups. In a meeting with Manila Muslim leaders, President Arroyo clarified that the campaign against terrorism was carried out without ethnic or religious bias.

According to March 2004 press reports, the National Security Advisor claimed that Christians who had converted to Islam were the vanguard of terrorist activities in Metro Manila, Mindanao, and other areas and had links with the ASG and

Jemaah Islamiyah, an Indonesia-based terrorist group. Afterwards, the President issued a statement that the campaign against terrorism should be carried out without any ethnic or religious basis.

Perceived religious discrimination sometimes leads to violence. In February 2005, a Moro rights advocate, his wife, and son were killed in Sulu, allegedly by members of the AFP conducting counter-insurgency operations. Afterwards, the MNLF rebel group attacked the military camp in Sulu in retaliation for the deaths, setting off several weeks of intense fighting in the region which displaced at least 26,000 civilians.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the courts had not resolved any of the 73 cases involving Muslims detained by the military in 2002, following the President's declaration in 2001 of a "state of lawlessness" in Basilan. Several human rights groups maintained that the detainees were innocent civilians who had been targeted because they were Muslim.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

The ASG claims to seek the immediate establishment of an independent Islamic state in the southwestern region. This terrorist group is primarily a loose collection of criminal-terrorist and kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and mainstream Muslim leaders reject its claimed religious affiliation, strongly criticizing its actions 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. According to the military, the ASG had 300 to 400 members, which is lower than in previous years.

On February 14, 2005, a bomb was detonated near a bus at the intersection of EDSA and Ayala Avenue in Makati, killing 4 persons and injuring 103. The same night, 2 more blasts killed 4 persons and injured 42 in the cities of Davao and General Santos in Mindanao. The ASG claimed responsibility for all three bombings and said the bombings were their "continuing response to the Government atrocities committed against Muslims everywhere." Many national Muslim organizations, including the MILF, condemned the attacks as "despicable" and "barbaric." A report by the PNP's Explosive Ordnance Division said the attacks were "well planned" and coordinated, having occurred within an hour of each other.

In addition, on February 7, 2005, approximately 500 followers of jailed former MNLF leader Nur Misuari, reportedly in coordination with elements of ASG, attacked government forces in Jolo and other towns of Sulu. The attack was in retaliation for alleged military abuses during anti-insurgency operations in pursuit of Abu Sayyaf guerrillas. The Government continued to step up its military operations in the area, which have led to the displacement of approximately 50,000 local residents. Although hostilities abated by the end of this reporting period, the Government continued to demand the unconditional surrender of all militant parties in the region.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is some ethnic, religious, and cultural discrimination against Muslims by Christians. 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 their relationship is harmonious in some areas. However, efforts by the dominant Christian population to resettle in traditionally Muslim areas over the past 60 years have fostered resentment among many Muslim residents. Many of them 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 names 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 sometimes automatically associated with the MILF separatist movement apparently because of their religion.

The cleavage between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao is exacerbated by the fact that the country is predominately Christian; however, sectarian violence is rare. Christians and Muslims remain suspicious of one another, although relations are not overtly hostile. In general, societal attitudes towards religion are open and relaxed, mirroring the national culture.

Religious dialogue and cooperation among the various religious communities generally remain amicable. Many religious leaders are involved in ecumenical activities and also in interdenominational efforts to alleviate poverty. The Interfaith Group, which is registered as a nongovernmental organization (NGO), includes Roman Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant representatives joined together in an effort to support the Mindanao peace process through work in the communities of former combatants.

The Bishops-Ulama Conference meets monthly in an effort to deepen mutual understanding between Roman Catholic and Muslim leaders and also actively supports the Mindanao peace process. The Archbishop of Davao, the President of the Ulama League of the Philippines, and the head of the National Council of Churches strongly support this effort. The conference seeks to foster exchanges at the local level between parish priests and local Islamic teachers and community leaders. Paralleling the dialogue fostered by religious leaders, the Silsila Foundation in Zamboanga City hosts a regional exchange to reduce bias and promote cooperation among Muslim and Christian academics and local leaders. 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.

Amicable ties among religious groups are reflected in many unofficial organizations. The leadership of human rights groups, trade union confederations, and industry associations typically represent many religious persuasions.

In August 2004, the owner of a shopping mall in Greenhills, San Juan, started the construction of a "mussalah" or prayer room for the more than 500 Muslim traders in the mall. A homeowners association in Greenhills strongly opposed the construction of the prayer room, arguing that it would attract Muslims who disregard the law and would become a haven for terrorists. The prayer room nonetheless opened at the end of 2004, without further incident and with support from the Muslim community and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers met with representatives of all major faiths to discuss their concerns. In addition, the U.S. Government actively supported the Government's peace process with Muslim insurgents in Mindanao, which has the potential to contribute to peace and a better climate for interfaith cooperation.

The Embassy also maintained active outreach with NGOs. The Embassy hosted meetings of political and opinion leaders from the Muslim community to discuss the U.S. role in Mindanao. The Embassy continued to engage communities outside Manila. In November 2004, the Ambassador hosted the annual Iftar at his residence during Ramadan.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy sent both Muslim and Christian leaders to the United States on International Visitor Program (IVP) grants. The 2005 IVP, in addition to promoting interfaith dialogue, had programs that examined how religious organizations and faiths work with each other in the United States. The Philippine International Visitor Alumni Association maintains its own working group focusing on peace and Muslim-Christian relations.

The Embassy provided assistance to various interfaith dialogue initiatives and promoted similar themes in its speakers program. Programs to foster interfaith dialogue included a second Citizen Exchange Program for Christian and Muslim High School Students in Mindanao (ACCESS), which allowed 40 high school students to

travel to Chicago to learn methods for dispute resolution and ways to foster inter-ethnic cooperation. Also, the Partnerships for Learning Youth Exchange and Study (P4L YES) Program brought 40 Muslim students to the United States for a full year of academic study in 2004–05. They learned about American society, developed leadership skills, educated Americans on Philippine culture, and helped to establish a common bond between Muslim communities. In addition, an NGO received an Embassy grant to hold discussions on Islamic culture in the country and its relationship with democracy.

In 2005, the International Visitor Alumni Association, in cooperation with the President's National Youth Commission, held a series of workshops on Mindanao where youth leaders, including children associated with the MILF, discussed ways they could work for peace and better interfaith relations in their communities.

In September 2004, the Embassy brought an expert in conflict transformation from the United States for a series of speaking engagements, seminars, and meetings focused on overcoming the tensions and prejudices that divide Christians and Muslims.

Also in September 2004, the Embassy gave a grant of \$18,000 to the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy to conduct a series of conferences on "The Role of Islam and Muslims in Philippine Democracy." The conference brought together Muslim leaders from throughout the country and examined connections between Islam and the principles and processes of democracy, and in the process it counteracted the mistaken assumption that Islam and democracy are fundamentally incompatible. The concluding conference in the series took place in Manila and featured the U.S. Ambassador as one of the speakers.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, which mainly consists of two islands, has an area of 1,135 square miles, and its population is approximately 177,000. Most live on the island of Upolu, where the capital, Apia, is located. Nearly 100 percent of the population is Christian. The 2001 population and housing census revealed the following religious distribution of the population: Congregational Christian, 35 percent; Catholic, 20 percent; Methodist, 15 percent; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 13 percent; and Assemblies of God, 7 percent. These statistics reflect continual growth in the number and size of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Assembly of God congregations and a relative decline in the membership of the historically larger denominations. In addition, there are small congregations of other Protestant denominations such as Nazarene and Baptist. There are also members of the Baha'i Faith—the country hosts one of only seven Baha'i Houses of Worship in the world—and a few adherents to Islam. There are four theological colleges and Rhema, a bible study school that is also growing in popularity. There are no reports of avowed atheists. The distribution of church membership 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. nationals from American Samoa.

The major denominations that are present in the country all have missionaries, as does the Baha'i 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, 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." Although Christianity is favored constitutionally, there is no official state religion.

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 latter do not have religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Pastoral schools in most villages provide religious instruction following school hours.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, White Monday, and Christmas are national public 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.

The Constitution grants each person the right to change religion or belief and to worship or teach religion alone or with others; however, in practice the matai (village chiefs) often choose the religious denomination of the aiga (extended family). Since 2000, there have been 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also maintains contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities.

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 the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The Government does not tolerate speech or actions that it deems could adversely affect 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 270 square miles, and its total population is approximately 4.2 million, of whom 3.5 million are citizens or permanent residents. According to a 2000 government survey, 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 is Muslim, approximately 15 percent is Christian, and just over 4 percent is Hindu. The remainder is composed of 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 is ethnic Chinese, 14 percent ethnic Malay, and 8 percent ethnic Indian. Nearly 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 Roman 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 or her religious belief so long as such activities do not breach any other laws relating to public order, public health, or morality. There is no state religion.

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. Such a designation makes it impossible to maintain a legal identity as a religion, with consequences relating to owning property and conducting financial transactions, or to hold public meetings.

The Government plays an active but limited role in religious affairs. For example, the Government seeks to ensure that citizens, most of whom live in publicly subsidized housing, have ready access to religious organizations traditionally associated with their ethnic groups by helping such institutions find space in these housing complexes. The Government maintains a semi-official relationship with the Muslim community through the Islamic Religious Council (MUIS), which was set up under the Administration of Muslim Law Act. The MUIS advises the Government on concerns of the Muslim community, drafts the approved weekly sermon, regulates some Muslim religious matters, and oversees a mosque building fund financed by voluntary payroll deductions. The Constitution acknowledges Malay/Muslims as "the indigenous people of Singapore" and charges the Government specifically to promote their political, educational, religious, economic, social, cultural, and language interests.

The 1961 Women's Charter 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. The act also allows 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 the financial capability of the husband. There were 340 applications for polygynous

marriage from 1999 to 2003, of which 109 were approved, representing approximately 0.5 percent of all Muslim marriages during that period.

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 or more official holiday for each major religion in the country: Hari Raya Haji and Hari Raya Puasa for Muslims, Christmas and Good Friday for Christians, Deepavali for Hindus, and Vesak Day for Buddhists.

In 2003, the Government, in consultation with representatives of all the major faiths and the general public, adopted a Declaration on Religious Harmony to affirm the values seen as necessary for maintaining good relations between the country's religious communities. The Government generally promotes interfaith understanding indirectly by sponsoring activities to promote interethnic harmony. Because the primary ethnic minorities each are predominantly of one faith, government programs to promote ethnic harmony have implications for interfaith relations. For example, the Inter-Racial Confidence Circles were created in 2002 to foster greater interaction and understanding among the different ethnic and religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricts certain religions by application of the Societies Act. 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 the country; at the end of the period covered by this report, there were 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 for being believers, the result of deregistration has been to make public meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses illegal. Nevertheless, since the 1996 ruling, no charges have been brought against persons attending or holding Jehovah's Witness meetings in private homes.

The Government can also influence religious practice through the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. The act was passed in 1990, and revised in 2001, in response to actions that the Government viewed as threats to religious harmony. This includes aggressive and "insensitive" proselytizing and "the mixing of religion and politics." The act established the Presidential Council on Religious Harmony, which reports to the Minister of Home Affairs and is empowered to issue restraining orders against leaders and members of religious groups to prevent them from carrying out political activities, "exciting disaffection against" the Government, creating "ill will" between religious groups, or carrying out subversive activities. These orders place individuals on notice that they should not repeat such acts; contravening a restraining order can result in fines of up to \$5,984 (S\$10,000) and up to 2 years' imprisonment for a first offense. The act also prohibits judicial review of its enforcement or of any possible denial of rights arising from it.

In April 2005, two Falun Gong adherents were found guilty of illegal assembly and distribution of video compact disks that had not been certified by the Board of Film Censors. The two women chose to serve a prison sentence rather than pay fines of \$12,092 (S\$20,000) and \$14,510 (S\$24,000), respectively. They were released after a week once their families had paid the fines. The offenses were alleged to have taken place between November 2002 and March 2003. The law mandates police permits for outdoor assemblies of five or more persons and prohibits the distribution of films, including video discs, without a license.

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. Authorities did not detain any Jehovah's Witnesses for proselytizing during the covered by this report or the previous 12-month period.

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 groups, although the Bible itself has not been outlawed. A per-

son in possession of banned literature can be fined up to \$1,176 (S\$2,000) and jailed up to 12 months for a first conviction.

Unlike in the past, there were no government seizures of Jehovah's Witnesses literature during the period covered by this report. In the previous 12-month period, 11 individuals were detained briefly for attempting to bring Jehovah's Witnesses publications into the country from Malaysia, down from 30 cases in 2003. In each instance, the literature was confiscated but no charges were filed.

No Jehovah's Witnesses students were suspended from school for refusing to sing the national anthem or participate in the flag ceremony during the period covered by this report. There were two such suspensions during the previous 12-month period.

Compulsory education began in January 2003. In response to concern from the Malay/Muslim community regarding the fate of madrassahs (Islamic religious schools), the Government has temporarily exempted madrassah students from compulsory school attendance. If madrassahs do not achieve minimum academic standards by 2008, they will no longer be allowed to teach core subjects such as science, mathematics, and English.

At the end of the period covered by this report, there were 16 members of Jehovah's Witnesses incarcerated in the Armed Forces Detention Barracks because they refused to carry out the legal obligation for all male citizens to serve in the Armed Forces. Of these, four began their sentence during the period covered by this report. 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. Failure to perform annual military reserve duty, which is required of all those who have completed their initial 2-year obligation, results in 40-day sentences; a 12-month sentence is usual after four such refusals. All of the Jehovah's Witnesses in detention were incarcerated for failing to perform their initial National Service obligations and expect to serve a total of 39 months.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Nearly all ethnic Malay citizens are Muslim, and ethnic Malays constitute the great majority of the country's Muslim community. Attitudes held by the Malay and non-Malay communities regarding one another are based on both ethnicity and religion, which in effect are impossible to separate.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,985 square miles and its population is approximately 538,000. Most citizens are members of the following Christian churches: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist. Traditional indigenous religious believers, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, account for an estimated 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, comprise 2 percent. There are believed to be members of additional religions within the foreign community who are free to practice their religion, but they are not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies. According to the most recent census figures, there are 12 Muslims in the country.

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. Except for the Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy is approximately 50 percent foreign, the clergy of the other traditional churches is nearly entirely indigenous. Traditional domestic church missionaries are represented by religions such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the United Church (Methodist), the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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 Department of Home and Cultural Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterizes this role, on one hand, as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression and, on the other hand, maintaining 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 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 public school curriculum includes 30 minutes of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed upon by the Christian churches; students whose parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. The Government subsidizes church schools only if they align their curriculums with governmental criteria. Although theoretically non-Christian religions can be taught in the schools, there is no such instruction at present.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period of the report.

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.

During 2003, Guadalcanal militants abducted a number of members of an Anglican religious order and killed seven of them. In June 2003, militant leader Harold Keke was arrested for these and other killings. In March 2005, Keke was convicted of the murder of Father Augustine Geve and sentenced to life imprisonment.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States does not have a permanent presence in the country; however, the U.S. Embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote 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 practice 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 unregistered missionaries are present in large numbers and 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. While continuing separatist violence in the southernmost provinces led to increased localized tensions between Buddhist and Muslim communities, religious practices were not significantly inhibited.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 198,000 square miles, and its population is an estimated 64 million. In a 2000 survey, more than 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, estimates by nongovernmental organizations, 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. There are small animist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, and Taoist populations. No official statistics exist as to the numbers of atheists or persons who do not profess a religious faith or belief, but 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. 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. The Religious Affairs Department (RAD) reports that there are 3,479 registered mosques in 64 provinces, with the largest number in Pattani Province. The majority of these mosques are associated with the Sunni branch of Islam. The remainder, estimated by the RAD to be from 1 to 2 percent of the total, are associated with the Shi'a branch of Islam.

According to government statistics, there are an estimated 486,800 Christians in the country, constituting 0.8 percent of the population. There are several Protestant denominations, and most 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 nine tribal groups (*chao khao*) recognized by the Government, with an estimated population of 500,000 to 600,000 persons. Syncretistic practices drawn from Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and spirit worship are common. The Sikh Council of Thailand estimates the Sikh community to have a population of approximately 70,000 persons, most of which reside in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Nakhon Ratchasima, Pattaya, and Phuket. There are currently 17 Sikh temples in the country. According to government statistics, there are an estimated 2,900 Hindus in the country, although Hindu organizations estimate the population to be closer to 10,000 persons.

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 675 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 2005, there were approximately 3,230 *Dhammaduta* working in the country. In addition, during the period covered by this report, the Government sponsored the international travel of another 1,038 Buddhist monks sent by their temples to disseminate religious information to 25 countries. Muslim organizations reported having small numbers of citizens working as missionaries in the country and abroad. Christian organizations reported much larger numbers of missionaries, both foreign and Thai, operating in the country.

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 officially designated as such.

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 southern 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 Culture, 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. A religious organization also must be accepted into an officially recognized ecclesiastical group before the RAD will grant registration. During the period covered by this report, there were five such groups: the Buddhist community, the Muslim community, the Brahmin-Hindu community, the Sikh community, and the Catholic community, which includes four Protestant sub-groups. Government registration confers some benefits, including access to state subsidies, tax-exempt status, and preferential allocation of resident visas for organization officials. However, since 1984 the Government has not recognized any new religious faiths. In practice, unregistered religious organizations operate freely, and the Government's practice 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). The Government allocated approximately \$41 million (1.6 billion baht) during fiscal year 2005 to support the National Buddhism Bureau, which was established in 2002 as a separate independent state

agency. The office oversees the Buddhist clergy and approved the curricula of Buddhist teachings for all Buddhist temples of educational institutions. In addition, the Bureau promotes the Buddhist faith by sponsoring educational and public relations materials on the faith and practice in daily life by the people.

For fiscal year 2005, the Government, through the RAD, allocated \$1.1 million for Islamic organizations, \$56,210 for Christian organizations, and \$15,385 for Brahman-Hindu and Sikh organizations.

The budgets for Buddhist and Muslim organizations included funds to support Buddhist and Muslim institutes of higher education, fund religious education programs in public and private schools, provide daily allowances for monks and Muslim clerics who hold administrative and senior ecclesiastical posts, and subsidize travel and health care for monks and Muslim clerics. This figure also included 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. Catholic and Protestant groups 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. Private donations to registered religious organizations are tax deductible.

Religious instruction is required in public schools at both the primary, grades 1 through 6, and secondary, grades 7 through 12, education levels. The Ministry of Education has formulated a new course called "Social, Religion, and Culture Studies," which students in each grade study for 1 to 2 hours each week. The course contains information about all of the recognized religions in the country—Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Brahmin/Hinduism, and Sikh. Students who wish to pursue in-depth studies of other religions or of their belief may study at the religious schools and can transfer credits to the public school. Schools, working in conjunction with their local school administrative board, are authorized to arrange additional religious studies courses. The Supreme Sangha Council and the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand have created special curriculums for Buddhist and Islamic studies.

There are a variety of Islamic education opportunities for children. Tadika is an after-school religious course for children in grades one through six, which is under the supervision of the RAD and generally takes place in a mosque. There are currently 1,621 registered Islamic Religious and Moral Education centers teaching Tadika, with approximately 173,000 students and more than 4,000 teachers. For secondary school children, the Ministry of Education allows two separate curricula for private Islamic studies schools. The first type teaches only Islamic religious courses. More than 311 schools nationwide with approximately 30,461 students and 6,011 teachers use this curriculum. The Government registers but does not certify these schools, and students from these schools cannot continue to any higher education within the country. The second curriculum teaches both Islamic religious courses and traditional state education coursework. Approximately 200 schools nationwide with more than 108,000 students and 4,450 teachers use this curriculum. The Government recognizes these private schools, and graduating students can continue to higher education within the country. A third type of Islamic education available, mostly in the southern part of the country, is traditional pondok schools. During the period covered by this report, the Government registered 309 pondok schools in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces. Previously, these religious schools were not required to register with the Government and received no government oversight or funding. The registration effort began in April 2004 in response to the increased separatist violence following an attack on a military post and arms depot in Narathiwat in January 2004. Government investigations following that incident led the authorities to pursue suspects associated with pondok schools. The total number of pondoks, students, and teachers is unknown. Sources believe that there could be several hundred to 1,000 pondoks in the south.

The Government actively sponsors interfaith dialogue 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 and members of all religious groups certified by RAD. The programs 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). In September 2004, the RAD organized a national interreligious assembly in Chonburi which had 800 participants and sponsored a National Day of Interreligious Reconciliation on April 10, 2005, which included a gathering of religious leaders and a prayer service at the Suan Amphorn

grounds in Bangkok. The RAD sponsored a public relations campaign promoting interreligious understanding and harmony, including prime-time television announcements. However, a continuing separatist insurgency by some militant ethnic Malay Muslims in the far southern region of the country led to continuing concerns that the violence may be contributing to increased tensions between the local Buddhist and Muslim communities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, government officials, at the request of Chinese government officials, have reportedly monitored Falun Gong members. During the period covered by this report, no action was announced by the Government on the two pending applications submitted by the local Falun Gong group. One application was submitted to register as an association with the Office of the National Cultural Commission and a second was submitted to the Police Department to print and distribute a weekly Falun Gong magazine. The group was able to print and distribute religious materials both in Thai and Chinese on a small, informal basis for free distribution. The Thai language daily newspaper *Matichon* reported in December 2004 that the Special Branch Police had discovered plans for a Falun Gong meeting in Bangkok the same month. The newspaper reported that the organizers agreed to cancel the meeting and that the foreign national Falun Gong practitioners visiting the country to attend the meeting had left voluntarily.

The Government does not recognize religious faiths other than the five existing groupings. However, unregistered religious organizations operate freely.

Although unregistered missionaries are present in large numbers, the number of foreign missionaries 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. At the end of 2004, there were 1,243 registered foreign missionaries in the country, most of them Christian. In addition to these formal quotas, far more missionaries, while not registered, are able to live and work in the country without government interference. While registration conferred some benefits, such as longer terms for visa stays, being unregistered was not a significant barrier to foreign missionary activity. Many foreign missionaries entered the country using tourist visas and proselytized 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 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. The 1962 Sangha Act specifically prohibits the defamation or insult of Buddhism and the Buddhist clergy. The Penal Code prohibits the insult or disturbance of religious places or services of all of the recognized religions in the country.

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, particularly in the country's southernmost provinces. Muslim female civil servants not required to wear uniforms are allowed to wear headscarves.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Violent acts committed by suspected Islamic militants in the provinces of Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkhla, and Yala have affected the ability of some Buddhists in this predominantly Muslim region to undertake the full range of their traditional religious practices. During the period covered by this report, there were no cases of Buddhist monks being killed in separatist violence. On March 24, 2005, a monk was injured by a bomb in Yala province. Three others were injured in separate incidents in June 2005. The monks were performing the morning ritual of receiving donations of food and were guarded by three armed soldiers. In June 2005, eight civilians were beheaded in six separate incidents. Some observers in the south, including some Muslim leaders, described these incidents as reprisal killings for the arrest and/or killing of suspected Muslim militants by authorities. At the end of the period covered by this report, no one had been arrested for the 2004 murder of three Buddhist monks and the beheading of one civilian Buddhist rubber tapper or for the

2004 attacks on Buddhist temples and one Chinese shrine in the southern provinces of the country. The Government continued to investigate these incidents in the context of security operations involving the on-going separatist violence in the South. Buddhist monks continued to report that they were fearful and thus no longer able to travel freely through southern communities to receive alms. They also claimed that laypersons sometimes declined to assist them in their daily activities out of fear of being targeted by militants.

Militants continued to assassinate minor government officials, such as village Headmen, teachers, and local Tambon (sub-district) council members, in the southern part of the country on an almost daily basis. Many government officials and law enforcement authorities presumed the slain Buddhist monks and laypersons who had no government affiliation were targeted solely because of their religious beliefs in an attempt by separatist militants to increase interfaith tensions. The level of interfaith tension varied greatly from district to district, and in some locales, even from village to village. The violence contributed to an atmosphere of fear and suspicion in the southern provinces. However, while the level of tension between local Islamic and Buddhist communities was heightened, it did not result in open communal conflict.

In response to the killings, the Government stationed troops to protect the religious practitioners and structures of all faiths in communities where the potential for violence existed and provided armed escort for Buddhist monks, where necessary, for their daily rounds to receive alms. The Government has not officially paid compensation to the families of 106 Islamic militants slain while attacking security forces on April 28, 2004. The Government allocated \$218,000 for the restoration of the Krue Se Mosque, which soldiers damaged during the fighting. During the period covered by this report, most of the restoration was completed.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious groups closely associated with ethnic minorities, such as Muslims, experienced some societal economic discrimination; however, such discrimination appeared to be linked more to ethnicity than to religion. Continued violence in the far southern regions of the country contributed to negative stereotypes of Muslims held by persons from other geographic areas of the country. Murders, including beheadings, and bombings clearly targeted at Buddhists, increased ethnic tensions between Muslim and Buddhist communities in the far south.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers regularly visit Muslim religious leaders, academics, and elected officials as part of the Embassy's goal of understanding the complex ethnic and religious issues at play in society.

During the period covered by this report, three Thai Muslims from a broad range of professions participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), which is the flagship professional exchange program of the Department of State and serves to introduce young professionals from a wide variety of fields to the U.S. at an early stage in their professional development. In May 2005, 11 Thai Muslims were nominated for the 2006 IVLP program.

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 religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 288 square miles, and its population is approximately 112,400. 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, and; others, 17 percent. However, both Roman Catholics and Mormons state that the number of adherents is higher than reported. Members of the Tokaikolo Church (a local offshoot of the Methodist Church), Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Anglicans, the Baha'i Faith, Islam, and Hinduism are present in much smaller numbers. There is no resident Jewish community. There were no reports of atheists.

Western missionaries, particularly Mormons and other Christian denominations, were 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 strived to protect this right in full and did 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 it 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 operated without special restrictions. There were a number of schools operated by Mormons and by the Wesleyan Church.

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

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) maintained policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines stated 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." Although religious leaders from all religions were permitted to host programs, due to this policy, the TBC did 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 did not allow Mormons to discuss their founder, Joseph Smith, or the Book of Mormon by name. This policy applied to all churches. Mormons use Radio Tonga for the announcement of church activities and functions. Other faiths also utilize Radio Tonga. Members of the Baha'i Faith use a privately owned radio station for program activities and the announcement of functions. A government-owned newspaper occasionally carried 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 an Embassy in the country; the U.S. Ambassador in Suva, Fiji, was accredited to the Government in Nuku'alofa. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officials from the U.S. Embassy in Fiji met 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is composed of 9 island groups with an 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. Government estimates as a percentage of population include: 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 active Christian missionary organizations in the country representing some of the above-mentioned religious faiths.

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 ceremonies 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 restrictions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, in 2003, the island council of Nanumanga banned the newly formed Tuvalu Brethren Church. The head of the Tuvalu Brethren Church filed a complaint against the island council. This case was heard in May 2005, and a verdict was scheduled to be handed down during the summer.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, 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, in view of the fact that they comprise approximately 90 percent of the population.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. Ambassador to Fiji is also accredited to the Government. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Fiji visited the country periodically and discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of the overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials also meet with representatives of religious communities and nongovernmental organizations that have an interest in religious freedom. The Embassy actively supported 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation, covering 4,707 square miles, and its population is approximately 206,000. The great majority belongs to Christian churches, although many combine their Christian faith with cultural practices in place prior to the arrival of Christianity on the islands. Church membership primarily is Presbyterian (approximately 32 percent), Roman Catholic (13 percent), Anglican (13 percent), and Seventh-day Adventist (11 percent). Another 14 percent are members of the Church of Christ, the Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God, and other Christian denominations. The John Frum Movement, a political party that also is an indigenous religious movement, is centered on the island of Tanna and includes about 5 percent of the population. Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) 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 are now primarily indigenous. Missionaries represent the Church of Christ, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, and Roman Catholics. The Summer Institute of Linguistics, which translates the New Testament into indigenous languages, also is present.

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 does not tolerate the abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors.

Religious organizations are required to register with the Government; however, this law is not enforced.

The Government interacts with churches through the Ministry of 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 groups 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 Government does not attempt to control missionary activity.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; 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 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. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

VIETNAM

Both the Constitution and law provide for freedom of worship; however, the Government continued to restrict 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 in the religion of their choice, but the country's legal framework governing religion requires that the organization and activities of all religious denominations be officially sanctioned by the Government.

Respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report; however, a number of positive legal reforms remained in the initial stages of implementation. During the period covered by this report, the Government released a number of religious prisoners, facilitated a long-delayed national convention by one of the country's Protestant organizations, allowed the opening of a new training class for Protestant pastors, and introduced several new, less restrictive legal documents governing religion. In November 2004, the Ordinance on Religion and Belief went into effect and now serves as the primary document governing religious practice. In February 2005, the Prime Minister issued an "Instruction on Protestantism" that directed officials to assist unrecognized religious denominations in registering their activities so that they can practice openly. In March 2005, the implementation decree (number 22) for the new Ordinance on Religion established guidelines for religious denominations to register their activities and seek official recognition.

Participation in religious activities throughout the country continued to grow, and believers in the Central and Northwest Highlands reported improvements in their situation. However, restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of religious groups remained in place, and the Government maintained a role supervising recognized religions. Religious figures encountered the greatest restrictions when they engaged in activities that the Government perceived as political activism or a challenge to its rule. Official oversight of recognized religions and harassment or repression of followers of nonrecognized religions varied from locality to locality, often as a result of ignorance of national policy or varying local interpretations of it. Many of the hundreds of Protestant house churches in the Central Highlands that had been ordered to shut down in 2001 were able quietly to resume operations, although most had not yet sought or received official registration. Local officials in Dak Lak continued to block the opening and operation of house churches in that province. There were reports that officials pressured ethnic minority Protestants to recant their faith, but the frequency of such reports was less than in previous years. According to credible reports, the police arbitrarily detained and sometimes beat religious believers, particularly in the mountainous ethnic minority areas. The Government denied these allegations. The estimated number of prisoners and detainees held for religious reasons was at least 6, with a minimum of 15 more suffering various levels of restrictions on their activities including effective house arrest in some cases.

The relationship among religions in society generally was amicable. In various parts of the country, there were modest levels of interfaith cooperation and dialogue. 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 maintained an active and regular dialogue with senior and working-level government officials to advocate greater religious freedom. The U.S. Ambassador and other U.S. officials, including the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, raised concerns about the registration and recognition difficulties faced by religious organizations, the detention and arrest of religious figures, the repression of Protestants in the Central and Northwest Highlands, and other restrictions on religious freedom with the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, government cabinet ministers, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) leaders, provincial officials, and others.

In September 2004, the Secretary of State designated Vietnam as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In May 2005, the United States and Vietnam concluded an agreement in which the Government set forth a number of commitments to advance and protect religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 127,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 83 million. The Government officially recognizes one Buddhist organization (Buddhists make up approximately 50 percent of the population), the Roman Catholic Church (8 to 10 percent of the population), several Cao Dai organizations (1.5 to 3 percent of the population), one Hoa Hao organization (1.5 to 4 percent of the population), two Protestant organizations (.5 to 2 percent of the population), and one Muslim organization (0.1 percent of the population). Many believers belong to organizations that are not officially recognized by the Government. Most other Vietnamese citizens consider themselves nonreligious, although many practice traditional beliefs such as veneration of ancestors and national heroes.

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. The Office of Religious Affairs uses a much lower estimate of 12 percent (10 million) practicing Buddhists. 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 approximately 30 percent of Buddhists are devout and practice their faith regularly. 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 proportionately fewer Buddhists in certain highland areas, although migration of Kinh to these areas is changing the distribution somewhat. 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 8 million Roman Catholics in the country, although official government statistics put the number at 5,570,000. French missionaries introduced Catholicism in the 17th century. In the 1940s, 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. Catholics live throughout the country, but the largest concentrations remain in the southern provinces around Ho Chi Minh City, in parts of the Central Highlands and in the provinces southeast of Hanoi. Catholicism has revived in many areas, with newly rebuilt or renovated churches in recent years and growing numbers of persons who want to be religious workers. The proportion of Catholics in the population of some provinces appears to be increasing modestly.

Estimates of the number of Protestants in the country range from the official government figure of 500,000 to claims by churches of 1,600,000 or more. Protestantism in the country dates from 1911, when a Canadian evangelist from the Christian and Missionary Alliance arrived in Danang. The two official recognized Protestant churches are the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV), recognized in 2001, and the much smaller Evangelical Church of Vietnam: North (ECVN), recognized since 1963. The SECV has affiliated churches in all of the southern provinces of the country. The ECVN has 15 approved churches in the northern part of the country. The ECVN also has issued papers of affiliation to over 800 ethnic-minority house churches in the northern and northwestern mountainous regions, although it has not formally applied for official registration of any of these. There are estimates that the growth of Protestant believers has been as much as 600 percent over the past decade, despite government restrictions on proselytizing activities. Many of these persons belong to unregistered evangelical house churches. Based on believers' estimates, two-thirds of Protestants are members of ethnic minorities, including Hmong, Thai, and other minority groups in the Northwest Highlands, and 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 1980s. 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. Official government statistics put the number of Cao Dai at 2.4 million, although Cao Dai officials routinely claim as many as 4 million adherents. Cao Dai groups are most active in Tay Ninh Province, where the Cao Dai "Holy See" is located, and in Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta. There are 13 separate groups within the Cao Dai religion; the largest is the Tay Ninh sect, which represents 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 1940s and 1950s, the Cao Dai participated in political and military activities. Their opposition to the communist forces until 1975 was a factor in their repression after 1975. A small Cao Dai organization, the Thien Tien branch, was formally recognized in 1995. The Tay Ninh Cao Dai branch 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 Government, there are 1.6 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. Many Hoa Hao follow other sects that do not have official recognition.

Mosques serving the country's small Muslim population, estimated at 65,000 persons, operate in western An Giang Province, Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and provinces in the southern coastal part of the country. The Muslim community is composed mainly of ethnic Cham, although in Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang Province it includes some ethnic Vietnamese and migrants originally from Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. Approximately half of the Muslims in the country practice Sunni Islam. Sunni Muslims are concentrated in five locations around the country. An estimated 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 Ho Chi Minh City, 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 Qur'an is an abridged version of approximately 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 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 several 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 Ho Chi Minh City; some are ethnic Cham but most are Indian or of mixed Indian-Vietnamese descent.

There are an estimated 6,000 members of the Baha'i Faith, largely concentrated in the south. Prior to 1975, there were an estimated 200,000 believers, according to Baha'i officials. Open Baha'i practice was banned from 1975 to 1992, and the number of believers dropped sharply during this time. Since 1992, the Baha'i have met in unofficial meeting halls. Community leaders say they have good relations with authorities. Some Baha'i members in Ho Chi Minh City were allowed to hold a quiet ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the Baha'i Faith in the country in May 2004.

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 Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Some are pre-1975 converts, while others became Mormons while living abroad.

At least 10 active but unofficially unrecognized congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses, with several hundred members, are present in the country. Most of the congregations are in the south, with five in Ho Chi Minh City.

Of the country's approximately 83 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. Many ethnic minorities have converted to Catholicism or Protestantism.

Foreign missionaries legally are not permitted to proselytize or perform religious activities. Undeclared missionaries from several countries are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, law, and a 2003 Communist Party Central Committee resolution on religion provide for freedom of belief and worship as well as of nonbelief; however, the Government required the registration of all activities by religious

groups and used this requirement to restrict activities in certain cases and some areas. Further, the Government continued to restrict significantly the organized activities of independent religious groups and those individuals who it regarded to be a threat to Party authority. 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 Government's legal framework governing religion changed significantly during the period covered by this report. The new Ordinance on Religion and Belief came into effect on November 15, 2004. The Ordinance serves as the primary document governing religious practice in Vietnam. It reiterates citizens' rights to freedom of belief, religion, and freedom not to follow a religion, and it states that violations of these freedoms are prohibited. However, it advises that "abuse" of freedom of belief or religion "to undermine the country's peace, independence, and unity" is illegal and warns that religious activities must be suspended if they negatively affect the cultural traditions of the nation. The ordinance continues the practice of government control and oversight of religious organizations. Among its provisions are that religious denominations must be officially recognized by the national-level Government, that individual religious congregations must be recognized by appropriate lower-level authorities, and that the establishment of seminaries and enrollment of classes must be approved by appropriate authorities. The naming of priests or other religious officials requires the approval of authorities only when a "foreign element," such as the Vatican, is involved. The ordinance liberalizes government oversight of religion to some extent. For example, religious organizations are only required to inform appropriate authorities of their annual activities or the promotion and transfer of clerics, while in the past this required explicit official approval. Further, the ordinance encourages religious groups to carry out charitable activities in healthcare and education, which was limited in the past.

On March 1, the Government issued an implementing decree that provided further guidance on the Ordinance on Religion and Belief. As in the ordinance, the decree explicitly bans forced renunciations of faith. It also delineates specific procedures by which an unrecognized religious organization can register its places of worship, its clerics, and its activities, and thus operate openly. It further provides procedures for these groups to apply for official recognition from the Government to gain additional rights. The decree specifies that a religious organization must have 20 years of "stable religious operation" in the country in order to be recognized by the Government. It states that past operation in the country, even prior to registration, can be counted toward the 20 year requirement. It further sets out specific time periods for the Government to consider requests from religious organizations and requires officials to give organizations an explanation in writing for any application that is rejected.

On February 4, the Prime Minister issued the "Instruction on Some Tasks Regarding Protestantism." The instruction calls upon authorities to facilitate the requests of recognized Protestant denominations to construct churches and train and appoint pastors. Further, the instruction directs authorities to help unrecognized denominations register their congregations with authorities so that they can practice openly and move towards fulfilling the criteria required for full recognition. Addressing the Central and Northwest Highlands, the instruction guides authorities to help groups of Protestant believers register their religious activities and practice in homes or "suitable locations," even if they do not meet the criteria to establish an official congregation. The instruction allows unregistered "house churches" to operate so long as they are "committed to follow regulations" and are not affiliated with separatist political movements.

In the spring of 2005, the national-level Committee for Religious Affairs held two conferences for provincial-level religious affairs committees to explain the new legal framework for religion in Vietnam, as defined in these documents. The provincial-level committees were then charged with disseminating information about the new legal framework to district-, commune-, and village-level authorities. Knowledge of the new legal framework at lower levels of the Government was mixed, however. The national-level Committee for Religious Affairs also held three conferences for leaders of officially recognized religious denominations to explain the new legal framework to practitioners. Authorities in some areas actively engaged religious leaders in efforts to implement the changes, while authorities in other areas remained ignorant of the changes.

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, members of nonrecognized religious groups sometimes undergo significant harassment or repression and are subject to the whims and prejudices of local officials. This was true particularly for Protestants in the Central and

Northwest Highlands. Subsequent to the issuance of the new legal framework governing religion during this reporting period, 16 new churches were opened in the Central Highlands. At the end of the reporting period, local and, in some areas, provincial authorities were engaged in discussions with religious leaders about registering house churches or recognizing new official congregations.

National security and national solidarity provisions in the Constitution override many laws providing for religious freedom, and these provisions reportedly have been used to impede religious gatherings and the spread of religion to certain ethnic groups. 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 nonbelievers." In some cases, particularly involving Hmong Protestants in the Northwest, ethnic minority Protestants in the Central Highlands (sometimes referred to as Montagnard Protestants), and Hoa Hao adherents, 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."

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." The authorities in some instances have used administrative probation to impose significant restrictions on the freedom of movement as a means of controlling persons whom they believe hold independent and potentially subversive opinions. Two-year administrative probation terms were placed on four UBCV leaders in October 2003 and remained in effect.

The Government does not favor a particular religion, and virtually all senior government and CPV officials as well as the vast majority of National Assembly delegates are formally "without religion," although many openly practice traditional ancestor worship and Buddhism. The prominent traditional position of Buddhism does not affect religious freedom for others adversely, including those who wish not to practice a religion.

The Government requires religious and other groups to register and uses this process to monitor and sometimes attempt to 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. Individual congregations within each of these religious groups must be registered as well. Some leaders of alternative Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai organizations and many believers of these religions do not participate in the government-approved associations. The Implementing Decree of the Ordinance on Religion and Belief, which was issued March 1, clarifies the procedures through which religious organizations and individual religious congregations can seek official recognition. The decree further specified that the appropriate authorities provide a written response to such request within 60 or 90 days, depending on the scope of the request. In the case of a refusal, a specific reason must be included in the written response. However, there is no specific mechanism for appeal given in the Ordinance, nor are the reasons for denying a request delimited in any way.

Some unrecognized Protestant denominations have indicated that they will seek registration and recognition under the new legal system governing religion. According to the Implementing Decree of the Ordinance on Religion and Belief, however, a 1-year period is required after November 15, 2004 (the effective date of the ordinance) before any new denomination that otherwise fulfills the appropriate criteria can be recognized. To obtain official recognition, a denomination must receive government approval of its leadership, its structure, and the overall scope of its activities. Recognized religious denominations, in principle, are allowed to open, operate, and refurbish places of worship, train religious leaders, and obtain permission for the publication of materials. In addition to denominations requiring recognition as a whole, each individual congregation within a denomination is also required by the ordinance to register. Registration is a somewhat more lenient process that requires the congregation to file with relevant authorities information about its structure, leadership, and activities. Authorities then have 45 days to raise questions or concerns. If no objections are raised, the congregation is legally authorized to operate at the end of this period. New congregations belonging to the SECV have begun to register under this new framework in the Central Highlands province of Gia Lai.

Except in certain parts of the Central and Northwest Highlands, officially recognized religious organizations are able to operate openly, and followers of these religions are able to worship without harassment. Officially recognized organizations

must register their annual activities and the transfer and promotion of clerics with authorities. Holding religious conferences or congresses, opening seminaries, enrolling classes in seminaries, collecting donations from believers, constructing or renovating religious facilities, and participating in religious training courses abroad still require the explicit approval of authorities. The naming of new clerics and the promotion of religious dignitaries, such as bishops, require registration with authorities. However when a “foreign element,” such as the Vatican, is involved, official approval is required in advance.

Because of the lack of meaningful due process in the legal system and inadequate higher-level oversight, the actions of religious adherents are subject to the discretion of local officials in their respective jurisdictions. There are no significant punishments for government officials who do not follow laws protecting religious practice, although a resolution on the victims of miscarriages of justice, issued by the National Assembly in 2003, provides channels for citizens to seek official compensation for some abuses.

There are no religious national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government practices placed restrictions on religious freedom, although in many areas Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and the Government itself reported an increase in religious activity and observance. Officially recognized religious groups faced limitations 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. However, there were significant examples of these limitations being eased in comparison to previous years.

The Government continued to ban and actively discourage participation in certain unrecognized religious groups, including the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) and some Protestant, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. Organizational activities by many of these groups are illegal, though enforcement of this ban varied widely.

Some evangelical house churches do not attempt to register because they want to avoid any semblance of government control. Some recognized religious groups carried out underground religious activities that they did not report to the Government and faced little or no harassment. Some nonrecognized Protestant groups also conducted religious services and training with the cognizance of authorities and without noticeable restriction from the Government.

The Government requires all Buddhist monks to be approved by and work under the officially recognized Buddhist organization, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS). The Government influenced the selection of the leadership of the VBS, excluding many leaders and supporters of the pre-1975 UBCV organization. The number of Buddhist seminarians is controlled and limited by the Office of Religious Affairs, although the number of Buddhist academies at the local and provincial levels has increased in recent years in addition to several university-equivalent academies. In November 2004, the VBS broke ground on a new Vietnam Institute of Buddhism in Hanoi. Khmer Theravada Buddhists are allowed a somewhat separate identity within the VBS.

The Government continued to oppose efforts by the unrecognized UBCV to operate independently. In 2003, senior monks of the UBCV held an organizational meeting without government permission at a monastery in Binh Dinh Province. Subsequent to the meeting, four leading monks of the church were detained and sentenced without trial to 2 years’ “administrative detention” in their respective pagodas. Authorities have not provided them with a written decision of their administrative detention, despite the legal requirement to do so. Many other leading UBCV members have been placed under conditions similar to administrative probation and, in some cases, effectively under “house arrest,” despite the lack of any charges against them. Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang and deputy leader Thich Quang Do have been placed under similar restrictions, although the Government did not appear to be investigating its allegations of “possession of state secrets” against them. In November 2004, Thich Quang Do attempted to travel to Quy Nhon Province to visit Thich Huyen Quang, who was hospitalized at that time. Thich Quang Do was blocked from doing so and was returned to his pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City under police escort. In June 2005, a group of UBCV monks attempted to visit Thich Huyen Quang in his pagoda but were prevented by police from doing so. Thich Quang Do and Thich Huyen Quang were able to receive visits from foreign diplomats and other UBCV members on occasion during the period covered by this report.

The Catholic Church hierarchy remained somewhat frustrated by government restrictions, but a number of clergy reported continued easing of government control

over church activities in certain dioceses. The Catholic Church continued to face restrictions on the training and ordination of priests and the naming of 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 Vatican and the Government reached agreement on mutually acceptable candidates, and all bishoprics were filled in 2004. The Catholic Church operates 6 seminaries in the country with over 800 students enrolled, as well as a new special training program for "older" students. All students must be approved by local authorities, both for enrolling in seminary and again prior to their ordination as priests. The Church believes that the number of students being ordained is insufficient to support the growing Catholic population and has indicated it would like to open additional seminaries and enroll new classes more frequently. During this reporting period, the Hanoi seminary received approval to begin enrolling new classes of seminarians annually, as opposed to once every 2 years, as remains the case for all other seminaries. The Church has had an application pending for 5 years to open a new seminary in Dong Nai Province, but this approval continued to be delayed by local authorities.

The northern Protestant ECVN held its long-delayed national congress in December 2004, the first time it has been able to do so since 1988. The meeting allowed the ECVN to vote on new leadership and set priorities for the development of the Church. The congress had been delayed initially due to government refusal to permit the meeting, and in recent years due to the Church's refusal to accept government interference in the selection of its leaders. ECVN members indicated that the Government gave the Church latitude to elect new leaders at the congress, and the Government showed its approval of the new board by inviting it to meet with the Deputy Prime Minister shortly after the congress adjourned. The southern Protestant SECV held its second national congress March 1 to 4, 2005, at which it elected a new leadership board for the organization. The SECV's first congress was held in 2001.

The practice of Protestantism remained a contentious issue in Vietnam's Central Highlands provinces. Some ethnic minority "Dega" separatists operating in this region have been linked to the "Dega Church." Credible reports indicated that "Dega Protestantism" mixes religious practice with political activism and ethnic minority separatism. During the period covered by this report, house churches generally reported improved conditions in the Central Highlands provinces of Gia Lai, Kon Tum, and Dak Nong, but close government scrutiny persists. In addition, significant restrictions on all Protestant churches continued to be imposed by authorities in Dak Lak Province. In 2001, the Government ordered almost all unrecognized Protestant house churches and meeting points in the Central Highlands, reportedly numbering in the hundreds, to close. Most of these have been allowed to reopen and operate, although they have not yet sought or received official registration. Local officials in Dak Lak continued to block the opening and operation of house churches in that province.

In 2003, the Committee on Religious Affairs in Hanoi issued a decree on the "normalization" of Protestantism in the Central Highlands and Binh Phuoc Province, intended to expedite the registration of churches in the region. Eighteen of the 33 southern Protestant SECV congregations in the Central Highlands have been recognized since the issuance of the normalization decree. In April 2005, the SECV opened a Bible school in Gai Lai Province to provide training to the many house church preachers in the region, allowing them to receive formal recognition as pastors. The SECV has sought to open a similar school in Dak Lak Province, as outlined by the 2003 decree, but local officials there remain recalcitrant. Some Protestant preachers in the Central Highlands are suspicious of the SECV due to its official sanction by the Government, and reportedly do not plan to seek affiliation with it.

The Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism instructs officials in the Central Highlands to continue to consider and recognize new chapters of the SECV. Officials are also to register those groups of Protestants who do not yet meet the official requirements as a congregation and "create favorable conditions for them to conduct their normal religious practice at home" or at suitable locations within their village. At the end of the period covered by this report, SECV officials in Gia Lai Province were in discussions with authorities over how to implement the instruction.

The Government continued its close oversight and, with varying degrees of success, exerted control over religious hierarchies, organized religious activities, and other activities of religious groups through Committees for Religious Affairs at the national and provincial levels. While the committees are tasked with protecting the rights of recognized religious bodies, in practice there are few effective legal rem-

edies for violations of religious freedom committed by government officials, particularly police. However, there have been some anecdotal reports that in some areas local police officials have been rebuked for harassing house churches in contravention of the Prime Minister's Order on Protestantism.

Many pastors of Protestant denominations such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, and Assemblies of God do not wish to join the SECV because of doctrinal differences. In many parts of Vietnam, particularly in urban areas, these and other unrecognized Protestant organizations reported that they were able to practice openly and with the knowledge of local officials. While there were notable exceptions, such as with the Ho Chi Minh City Mennonite church led by Le Thi Phu Dzung, as a rule, since early 2005, the level of official harassment of house churches has declined markedly across the country. The Government has held discussions about recognition and registration with leaders of at least four Protestant denominations, including Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

There is substantial networking among Protestant denominations in Ho Chi Minh City but less in the rest of the country. House churches from pre-1975 denominations generally were reported to have fewer restrictions than those established more recently.

In the Central Highlands, many religious figures reported that there had been considerable improvements in the situation for house churches in Gai Lai Province. In neighboring Dak Lak Province, however, the Protestant community was restricted to four officially recognized churches. Unrecognized churches had difficulty meeting and Protestant believers were largely able to pray only in their own homes. Nongovernment observers attributed this both to official suspicion by Dak Lak officials and to some links between SECV and house church members and separatist groups. Despite this, the number of Protestants in Dak Lak continued to grow, and several different unrecognized Protestant denominations were active in the province.

There are no officially recognized Protestant churches in the Northwest Highlands, despite the estimated presence of over 110,000 believers in the region. The Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism noted the existence of believers in the Northwest Highlands and instructed officials to guide them in finding "suitable places" to practice their religion. Nonetheless, in April and May 2005, officials from Lai Chau, Ha Giang, and Dien Bien Provinces told foreign diplomats that there were no Christians in their respective provinces. Officials in Lao Cai Province acknowledged the presence of Protestants, and said that, in keeping with Hanoi's instruction, they were seeking to open a dialogue with the Protestants on ways they could appropriately practice their religion.

The Hoa Hao have faced some 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. In 1999, a new official Hoa Hao body, the Hoa Hao Administrative Council was formed. In the spring of 2005, the Hoa Hao Administrative Council was expanded and renamed the Executive Committee of Hoa Hao Buddhism. Several leaders of the Hoa Hao community, including several pre-1975 leaders, openly criticized the Executive Committee. They claimed that the committee was subservient to the Government and demanded official recognition instead of their own Hoa Hao body, the Hoa Hao Central Buddhist Church (HHCBC). Although still unregistered, on May 4, 2005, the HHCBC held an organizational meeting that was attended by 126 delegates from across the southern part of the country. However, it was not allowed to celebrate the religion's "Foundation Day" on June 24. Two members of the HHCBC, Tran Van Thang and Tran Van Hoang, were arrested on February 25, 2005, and sentenced to 6 and 9 months' imprisonment respectively for unauthorized distribution of audio cassettes and DVDs containing teachings of HHCBC leaders. Another Hoa Hao member, Bui Tan Nha, has been imprisoned since 1997, reportedly for reasons connected to his faith. Several leaders of the HHCBC have complained of police surveillance. The Government continued to restrict the number of clergy that the Hoa Hao can train.

There are six different officially recognized branches of the Cao Dai Church, in southern Vietnam, as well as several others that remain unrecognized. These sects generally divide along geographic lines. The largest Cao Dai sect is based in Tay Ninh Province, where the religion was founded in 1926 and where the seat of Cao Dai authority is located. The Executive Council of the Tay Ninh Province Cao Dai received official government recognition in 1997. Independent Cao Dai groups allege that government interference has undermined the independence of the Tay Ninh group, and it no longer faithfully upholds Cao Dai principles and traditions. Reli-

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 they are able to practice their faith, including saying daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and teaching the Qur'an. Several Muslims undertake the Hajj every year, most of them using assistance provided by foreign sponsors. During the period covered by this report, several Muslim students were studying abroad at the invitation of foreign governments.

The Government controls and monitors all forms of public assembly, including assembly for religious activities; however, some large religious gatherings have been allowed, such as the Catholic celebrations at La Vang, traditional pilgrimage events such as the Hung Kings' Festival, and the Hoa Hao Founding Day and commemoration of the Founder's death, with attendance estimated at hundreds of thousands each year. House church Protestants have been able to gather in groups of as many as 5,000 for special worship services in Ho Chi Minh City and elsewhere.

The Government prohibits proselytizing by foreign missionary groups and discourages public proselytizing outside of recognized worship centers, including by Vietnamese citizens. Some missionaries visited the country despite this prohibition and carried on informal proselytizing activities.

Government policy does not permit persons who belong to unofficial religious groups to speak publicly about their beliefs, but at least some continue to conduct religious training and services without harassment. Members of registered religious organizations in theory are permitted to speak about their beliefs and attempt to persuade others to adopt their religions, at least in recognized places of worship, but are discouraged from doing so elsewhere.

The Government 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 after the Government first 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 Religious Publishing House has printed 250,000 copies of parts of the Hoa Hao sacred scriptures, along with 100,000 volumes featuring the Founder's teachings and prophecies; however, Hoa Hao believers reported that the Government continued to restrict the distribution of the full scriptures, specifically the poetry of the Founder. 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 Qur'an in 2000 to distribute one to each Muslim believer in the country. The Bible is printed in Vietnamese, Chinese and English, but not in ethnic minority languages. Some ethnic minority Protestants have had minority-language Bibles that were printed abroad seized by authorities.

The Government allows travel for religious purposes, but the approval of authorities is required for participation in religious conferences and training courses abroad. Muslims are able to undertake the Hajj, and Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant officials have generally been able to travel abroad for study and for conferences. Some Protestant house church leaders have alleged that they are unable to obtain passports for international travel, although other unofficial leaders travel internationally on a regular basis. 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.

Religious affiliation is indicated on citizens' national identification cards and in "family books," which are household identification documents. In practice, many citizens who consider themselves religious do not indicate this on their identification cards, and government statistics list them as nonreligious. There are no formal prohibitions on changing one's religion. While it is possible to change the entry for religion on national identification cards, many converts may find the procedures overly cumbersome or fear government retribution. Formal conversions appear to be relatively rare, apart from non-Catholics marrying Catholics. The Government does not designate persons' religions on passports.

The Government allows, and in some cases encourages, links between officially recognized religious bodies and coreligionists in other countries; however, the Government actively discourages contacts between the UBCV and its foreign Buddhist supporters. France-based Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh was permitted to return to the country in January for a 10-week trip, his first after 39 years of exile. Thich Nhat Hanh traveled widely through the country, met with large groups of Buddhist adherents, and spoke to intellectuals and political leaders, including Prime

Minister Phan Van Khai. Many of Thich Nhat Hanh's comments were critical of the situation for Buddhist believers, and he called for an end to the practice of Buddhist monks holding public offices and for reconciliation between Buddhist groups.

Contact between Vatican authorities and Catholics in the country occurs routinely, and the Government maintains a regular, active dialogue with the Vatican on a range of issues, including Church leadership, organizational activities, and the prospect of establishing diplomatic relations.

Contacts between some unregistered Protestant organizations and their foreign supporters are discouraged but occur regularly, including training and the provision of some financial support and religious materials. The Government is particularly vigilant about contact between separatist "Dega" Protestants in the Central Highlands and their overseas supporters. The Government regards Dega Protestants as a group that uses religion as a rallying point for militant action to establish an independent Dega state.

Adherence to a religious faith generally does not disadvantage persons in civil, economic, and secular life, although it likely would prevent advancement to higher CPV, government, and military ranks. The military does not have a chaplaincy. Avowed religious practice was formerly a bar to membership in the CPV, but now the CPV claims that tens of thousands of the 2.6 million Communist Party members are religious believers. A 2003 CPV Central Committee resolution on religion called for recruiting and advancing more religious believers into the CPV's ranks. Clergy and believers of various faiths serve in local and provincial government positions and are represented on the National Assembly. In the spring of 2004, the Fatherland Front indicated it was seeking to increase representation by religious believers in People's Councils. CPV and Government officials routinely visited pagodas, temples, and churches, making a special point to visit Protestant churches in the Central Highlands over Christmas.

The Implementing Decree for the Ordinance on Religion and Belief stipulates that local religious affairs committees must approve the construction of new religious facilities. The renovation of religious facilities requires simple notification of authorities, a relaxation on previous regulations.

Religious organizations have no legal claim to 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, authorities, mostly at the provincial level, have returned a limited number of confiscated church properties and remain in discussion on other properties. One of the vice-chairmen of the Government-recognized VBS has stated that approximately 30 percent of Buddhist properties confiscated in Ho Chi Minh City have been returned, and from 5 to 10 percent of all Buddhist properties confiscated in the south have been returned. The Catholic and recognized Protestant organizations have obtained a number of previously confiscated properties but have ongoing disputes with officials over others. Some properties have been returned to the Hoa Hao Administrative Council, but few Cao Dai properties have been returned, according to church leaders. Many of the properties seized in the past were religious schools that are now incorporated into the state school system.

Although the new Ordinance on Religion and Belief "encourages" religious organizations to conduct charitable activities in education and healthcare, the degree of government oversight of these activities varied greatly among localities. In some areas, especially in the south, Catholic priests and nuns operated kindergartens, orphanages, vocational training centers, and clinics, and engaged in a variety of other humanitarian projects. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, the Catholic Church is involved in supporting HIV/AIDS hospices and treatment centers and providing counseling to young persons. In April 2005, Ho Chi Minh City authorities did not allow the Church to open a new clinic for those who tested HIV/AIDS positive. They stated the request would need approval from higher level officials.

Charitable activities by the Catholic Church are much more restricted in northern Vietnam. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha engaged in humanitarian activities, including anti-drug programs, in many parts of the country. The officially recognized Hoa Hao organization reported that it engaged in numerous charitable activities and local development projects. Catholic, Protestant, and Buddhist groups 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.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; however, it permits clergy to teach at universities in subjects in which they are qualified. Buddhist monks have lectured at the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy, the main CPV school. Several Catholic nuns and at least one Catholic priest teach at Ho Chi Minh City universities. They are not allowed to wear religious dress when they teach or to identify themselves as clergy. Catholic 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.

There were no reported anti-Semitic incidents during the period covered by this report. The country's small Jewish population is comprised almost entirely of expatriates.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Reports of abuses of religious freedom diminished during the period covered by this report. However, a significant number of religious believers continued to experience harassment or repression because they operated without legal sanction. Local officials have repressed unregistered Protestant believers in the Central and Northwest Highlands and other areas by forcing church gatherings to cease, closing house churches, and pressuring individuals to renounce their religious beliefs, often unsuccessfully. Restrictions on UBCV leaders remained in place, with much of the group's leadership placed under official or de facto pagoda arrest. Police authorities often questioned persons who held independent religious or political views. There were credible reports that officials arbitrarily detained, physically intimidated, and harassed some persons based, at least in part, on their religious beliefs and practice, particularly in mountainous ethnic minority areas.

Ho Chi Minh City police regularly targeted for harassment the Mennonite house church led by Le Thi Phu Dzung. Police called Mrs. Dzung in for questioning on several occasions, repeatedly disrupted peaceful church services, and detained groups of followers for short periods. During the period covered by this report, Mrs. Dzung's husband, Mennonite pastor and house church leader Nguyen Hong Quang, was serving a 3-year prison term. Five of his followers were sentenced to between 9 months and 2 years in prison. Quang and his followers were convicted as a result of an incident in March 2004 in which he and several of his followers confronted and scuffled with two individuals they believed to be plainclothed police officers monitoring his residence. Quang and his followers seized a motorcycle belonging to the individuals and then reportedly scuffled again with uniformed officers sent to investigate the incident when the officers attempted to impound the motorcycle. However, some observers connected Quang's arrest to his broader social activism.

The international nongovernmental organization Human Rights Watch reported that security forces in Kontum Province demolished the chapel of Mennonite Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh in January and September 2004. Authorities reportedly based their actions on the fact that Chinh had purchased under a false name the land on which the chapel was built. Some observers noted that at least one other unregistered Protestant church operated a short distance away from Chinh's but suffered no harassment. Chinh has reportedly complained that he has been refused issuance of an identity card, which is required for household registration and ownership of property.

There are credible allegations that Baptist pastor Than Van Truong was involuntarily committed to a mental asylum by authorities in Doing Nai Province in July 2004, as a result of his religious and political activism. He remained there through the end of the period covered by this report. He had previously been kept in pre-trial detention for 8 months for "propagandizing against the government" and under house arrest for 6 months after he was released from pre-trial detention. He was imprisoned in June 2004 for violating the terms of his house arrest but transferred to a mental asylum shortly thereafter.

In October 2004, Ho Chi Minh City police disrupted an informal religious training session for 17 Hmong pastors in a private house. The Hmong were detained by police overnight and forced to return to their home provinces in the Northwest Highlands the following day. In May 2005, police disrupted a gathering of Protestant students from Hanoi Agricultural University and detained the students for a few hours. Also in May, Protestant House Church preacher Nguyen Van Cam told a reporter that local authorities in Dong Lam Commune of Tien Hai District, Thai Binh Province, had tried on several occasions to convince him to sign documents committing him to stop holding house church services. There are unconfirmed reports that a Methodist church in Xuan Lanh Commune, Dong Xuan District, Phu Yen Province, and a Nazarene Church in Phu Ly Commune, Vinh Cuu District, Dong Nai Province, were harassed by local authorities for holding "illegal gatherings."

Several leaders of nonrecognized churches in the Central and Northwest Highlands reportedly were harassed or detained and sometimes pressured to renounce their faith, usually without success.

House churches are frequently tolerated in some places, although their unofficial status often leaves them at the mercy of local authorities. For example, in February

2005, government border guards in Gap Trung village, Hoang Su Phi District, Ha Giang Province, reportedly intimidated local Protestants and blocked them from gathering to hold services in an unofficial house church. At least four house churches in Muong Nha Commune and Pu Nhi Commune of Dien Bien Province were reportedly unable to meet and hold religious services. In April 2005, local officials in Lu Khau Village in Ta Phin Commune of Sapa District reportedly seized the land of twelve ethnic Hmong Protestant families, telling them that God should provide food for them. The land was later returned. In addition, two Protestant believers from this village, Giang A Tinh and Trang A Cam, were reportedly beaten by local officials and urged to sign documents renouncing their faith. Sapa District authorities stated that the land seizures and physical clashes were, in fact, instigated by Hmong clan elders upset that the individuals had abandoned their traditional beliefs, and that when authorities became aware of the situation, they ensured that the land was returned.

At the end of the reporting period, the Government had not responded to Embassy inquiries about the reason for Hmong Protestant believer Mua Say So's continued detention. According to sources outside the Government, Mua Say So of Dien Bien District, Dien Bien Province, reportedly was detained in 2003 and sentenced to 42 months' imprisonment after accusing police of involvement in the death of his brother, Protestant believer Mua Bua Senh. Religious activists allege that Mua Bua Senh was beaten to death by authorities in 2002 for refusing to renounce his faith. In 2003, the Government informed diplomats that Mua Bua Senh had died of natural causes.

The repression of Protestantism in the Central Highlands is complicated by the presence of the small "Dega" separatist group, which advocates an autonomous or independent homeland for the indigenous persons who live in the area, particularly in Gia Lai and Dak Lak Provinces. The Dega have links to political advocacy groups residing in the United States, including the Montagnard Foundation, Inc., which has proclaimed itself a Dega "government-in-exile." While many Dega followers are Protestant, the "Dega Church" mixes religious practice with of political activism and ethnic minority separatism. The relationship between the Degas and Protestant believers belonging to the recognized SECV or apolitical house church groups is tense. The Degas reportedly have criticized certain mainstream Protestant pastors, many of whom accuse the Degas of manipulating religion for political purposes. 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 do not. One local Protestant leader estimated that 20 percent of Protestants in his province were actively affiliated with or sympathetic to the Dega. Other estimates of support for the Dega movement are much lower.

On April 10, 2004, several thousand ethnic minority citizens protested against authorities in several districts in the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, and Dak Nong. Authorities reportedly violently suppressed the protests, including beating or killing some of the protestors. A number of the protestors reportedly resorted to violence as well. Individuals supporting the Dega movement from abroad claimed that restrictions on religious freedom were a significant motivating factor in the protests. The Government, as well as many official and unofficial religious leaders, depicted the protests as being motivated by disputes over land or other socio-economic grievances.

Outflows of ethnic minority Central Highlanders seeking refugee status in Cambodia continued during the period covered by this report, and were especially numerous from July to December 2004. Potential asylees interviewed by the Office of the United National High Commissioner for Refugees in Cambodia cited disputes over land and continued poverty more than any other reason as the cause of their flight, although religious persecution was also cited.

In February 2005, police in An Giang Province detained Hoa Hao believers Tran Van Hoang and Tran Van Thanh for distributing unauthorized audio cassettes and DVDs with religious teachings on them. On April 27, authorities sentenced them to 9 and 6 months' imprisonment, respectively. While the two were convicted of illegal distribution of recordings, the extreme rarity with which this regulation is enforced in Vietnam led observers to believe they were targeted as a result of their adherence to the unrecognized HHCBC.

Imprisoned leaders and members of the HHCBC, such as Ha Hai, Truong van Duc, and Nguyen Van Lia, were amnestied during the period covered by this report.

In August 2004, authorities arrested Hong Thien Hank, leader of the small Tien Dinh Tan Chieu Minh Cao Dai sect in Tien Giang Province. The Government claimed that Hank had engaged in illegal religious activities, printed and distributed religious information without permission, and defrauded believers.

Priests and lay brothers of the Catholic order Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix continued to face government restrictions. Founded by Reverend Tran Dinh Thu in Bui Chu Diocese in 1953, the historically anti-communist order re-established its headquarters in Thu Duc District of Ho Chi Minh City in 1954. In 1988 police surrounded the 15-acre site and arrested all the priests and laypersons inside the compound. With the release in May 2005 of Co-Redemptrix priest Father Pham Minh Tri, only Nguyen Thien Phung remained imprisoned from that episode. His 20-year sentence is due to expire in March 2007.

Cao Dai believer Ngo Van Thong was arrested in 1983 and sentenced to death by a Tay Ninh provincial court; his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. Thong was released in 2001. The Government first reported his release in September 2004.

There were an estimated six religious prisoners and detainees held at the end of the period covered by this report, although the actual number may be higher. This was a significant reduction from the number of religious prisoners cited in the previous report. The number decreased both due to the release of a number of prisoners of concern and due to clarifications by the Government that many individuals who had been alleged by private groups to be held for religious reasons were, in fact, free.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of religious detainees and religious prisoners because 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. Some observers estimate the number of religious prisoners to be much higher, generally as a result of including individuals arrested for participation in “Dega” separatist groups or in the clashes between police and ethnic minority protestors in April 2004. At the end of the period covered by this report, the only person thought to be held without formal arrest or charge for reasons connected to his or her religious belief was Baptist Pastor Than Van Truong, who was being held in a mental asylum in Dong Nai Province.

At least 15 other individuals were held in conditions resembling house arrest for reasons related to the expression of their religious beliefs or attempts to form non-authorized religious organizations, despite the apparent lack of any official charges against them.

Those persons believed to be imprisoned or detained at least in part for the peaceful expression of their religious faith at the end of the period covered by this report included: Catholic priest Nguyen Thien Phung, Protestant believer Mua Say So, Cao Dai believer Hong Thien Hank, and Hoa Hao believers Tran Van Hoang, Tran Van Thanh, and Bui Tan Nha. Hoa Hao and Protestant groups alleged a number of other persons were kept in prison for religious reasons, but these claims could not be verified. UBCV monks Thich Tue Sy, Thich Nguyen Ly, Thich Thanh Huyen, and Thich Dong Tho were given 2-year sentences of administrative probation in 2003. Other religious leaders, including UBCV monks Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do and Catholic priest Pham Van Loi, were under de facto house arrest. 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.

Forced Religious Conversion

The implementing decree of the Ordinance on Religion and Belief, released on March 1, states that “Acts to force citizens to follow a religion or renounce their faith . . . are not allowed.” The Prime Minister’s Instruction on Some Tasks Regarding Protestantism, issued February 4, contained a similarly worded statement. While government officials said that forced conversions or renunciation of faith had always been illegal, these were the first legal documents to state so explicitly. Subsequent to the issuance of the implement decree, religious contacts from the Central and Northwest Highlands reported that attempted forced renunciations were less frequent. Nonetheless, several incidents were reported during the period covered by this report.

On several occasions, local officials in several northwestern villages reportedly attempted to convince or force Hmong Protestants to recant their faith. Local authorities reportedly also encouraged clan elders to pressure members of their extended families to cease practicing Christianity and to return to traditional practices. For example, four Hmong Protestants from Gap Trung Village, Hoang Su Phi District, Ha Giang Province, were reportedly pressured unsuccessfully by Government border guards to sign documents renouncing their faith in April 2005. Similarly, in May, authorities in Cha Cang Commune, Muong Lay District, Dien Bien Province, reportedly pressured believers from several Protestant house churches to construct traditional altars in their homes, and to sign documents renouncing Protestantism. In July and August 2004, authorities reportedly detained without charge more than

100 Hmong Protestants—choosing 1 member from each Protestant family—in at least 5 different communes in Sapa District, Lao Cai Province. The authorities attempted to force the detainees to renounce Protestantism, releasing them only when they promised to do so.

In the Central Highlands, there were credible reports that local authorities were encouraging ethnic minorities to abandon any affiliation with the “Dega” church and join other Protestant organizations.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The status of respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. Much of the change came through significant revisions to the legal framework governing religion and a lessening of government pressure on Protestant groups. However, at the end of this reporting period, the legal reforms remained in the early stages of implementation.

The Ordinance on Religion and Belief, which came into effect on November 15, 2004, upheld the principle of freedom of religion and belief. While maintaining the basic rule of close government oversight of religious organizations, it relaxed control of annual religious activities and the promotion and transfer of clerics in most cases by requiring that organizations only inform authorities, rather than seek their explicit approval. Further, the ordinance allows religious organizations to conduct charitable activities in education and healthcare, activities that had been highly restricted in the past.

The Implementing Decree for the Ordinance on Religion and Belief, issued March 1, 2005, further defined many facets of government oversight of religion. The decree states that acts to force others to renounce their faith are illegal. By setting forth the specific steps necessary for religious organizations to register as a whole and for congregations to register their activities and meeting places, the decree also gives clarity to processes that previously had been left largely to the discretion of local or provincial officials. Further, the decree stipulates that responses to such applications must come in writing and within a specific timeframe, adding further transparency to the process.

The Prime Minister’s “Instruction on Some Tasks Regarding Protestantism,” issued on February 4, 2005, urges officials to cooperate with Protestant believers and calls upon authorities to facilitate the requests of recognized Protestant denominations to construct churches and train and appoint pastors. Further, the instruction directs authorities to help unrecognized denominations register their congregations so that they can practice openly and move towards fulfilling the criteria required for full recognition. This stipulation effectively allows unrecognized “house churches” to operate so long as they are “committed to follow regulations” and are not affiliated with separatist movements.

Dissemination of these laws was a slow process, and, through the end of the period covered by this report, many leaders of places of worship reported that police and other authorities had not implemented fully these new legal codes. In some cases, officials were not aware of them or had not yet seen them. There were anecdotal reports of police and other government officials approaching house church leaders in some areas to inform them of the new regulations. There were reports from parts of the Northwest Highlands that local officials told believers the new laws did not apply to the Northwest. Subsequent to the release of the March 2005 Implementing Decree, when six different house churches from Ha Giang Province attempted to register with local authorities, their applications were not accepted. Despite this, many recognized and unrecognized religious groups reported that they believed the situation for their practitioners continued to improve.

In some anecdotal examples, a pastor from Ha Giang Province reported that he oversaw 55 congregations, only 1 of which had difficulties with authorities. While previously his practitioners had been forced to meet in small groups and at unusual hours, they now meet openly and during the daytime, with the full knowledge of authorities. In Hanoi, the Catholic Church noted that its long-standing requests to expand the size of its seminary and frequency of classes both were granted. The SECV reported a number of improvements in the Central Highlands. In Gia Lai Province, the SECV was permitted to open a Bible training school for unrecognized preachers, which will potentially lead to a rapid expansion in the number of new

pastors in that province. The SECV also opened nine new churches in Gia Lai Province and seven in Dak Nong Province during the period covered by this report. A number of the congregations in Gia Lai were reportedly provided land by provincial authorities on which to construct new church buildings.

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.

A number of religious prisoners were amnestied or otherwise released from prison during the period covered by this report. Four Hmong Protestants—Vang Chin Sang, Vang Mi Ly, Ly Chin Seng and Ly Xin Quang—from Hoang Su Phi District, Ha Giang Province, who had been sentenced to prison terms from 26 to 36 months in December 2003 after organizing unauthorized religious services, were amnestied in May 2005. Hmong Protestant leader Mua A Chau, who had been detained in Lai Chau Province in March 2003 and sentenced to 36 months in prison for “resisting a person carrying out official duties” after an altercation with police officers, was also amnestied in May 2005. UBCV monk Thich Thien Minh, who had been imprisoned since March 1979, was amnestied in February 2005. He had been sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment for “activities aimed at overthrowing the people’s government,” reportedly after protesting the destruction of his temple, and to 10 years’ imprisonment after an escape attempt.

Hoa Hao follower Nguyen Van Lia, who had been sentenced to 3 years’ imprisonment in October 2003 after holding a commemoration of the disappearance of the Hoa Hao prophet, was amnestied in September 2004. Nguyen Ha Hai, the third-ranking officer of the HHCBC who had been sentenced to 5 years in prison in 2001 for abusing “democratic rights,” was released on May 31, 2004, but died of cancer 15 days later. Ho Van Trong, who had been sentenced to 4 years’ imprisonment in May 2001 after a group of 60 to 70 individuals attacked a group of Hoa Hao headed by church leader Le Quang Liem, was released on June 11, 2004. Truong Van Duc, who had been sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment for involvement in the same event, was released in January 2005. Catholic priest Father Nguyen Van Ly, who had been serving a 5-year prison sentence since May 2001 for “damaging the Government’s unity policy,” was amnestied in May 2005. Also released in May was Catholic Co-Redemptrix priest Father Pham Minh Tri, who had been in prison since 1987.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In general, there are amicable relations among the various religious communities, and there were no known instances of societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the period covered by this report. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, there were some ecumenical dialogues among leaders of disparate religious communities. Buddhists, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai reportedly sometimes cooperate on some social and charitable projects. Various UBCV Buddhists, Catholic, Cao Dai, Protestant, and Hoa Hao activists appeared to network with each other; many of them reportedly formed bonds while serving prison terms at Xuan Loc. On February 15, more than 6,000 people attended an interfaith religious service organized by the Catholic Archdioceses of Ho Chi Minh City to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS. Buddhist, Muslim, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Protestant leaders also spoke at the service as did leading HCMC officials.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

In September 2004, the U.S. Secretary of State designated Vietnam a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) for the first time for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Subsequent to this, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, together with the United States Mission in Vietnam, conducted multiple discussions with the Government to urge improvements in religious freedom.

On June 21, 2005, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Vietnam discussed the status of religious freedom in the country. In early May, the Deputy Secretary of State visited the country and discussed human rights and religious freedom with high-level government officials.

On May 5, 2005, the United States and Vietnam concluded an agreement that addresses a number of important religious freedom concerns. Under the agreement, the Government made a number of commitments including: to fully implement the new laws on religious activities and to render previous contradictory regulations obsolete; to instruct local authorities to strictly and completely adhere to the new legislation and ensure their compliance; to facilitate the process by which religious congregations are able to open houses of worship, and; to give special consideration to

prisoners and cases of concern raised by the United States during the granting of prisoner amnesties. Dependent upon the Government's fulfillment of these commitments, the United States committed to consider the removal of Vietnam from the CPC list.

The Embassy in Hanoi and the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City actively and regularly raised U.S. concerns about religious freedom with a wide variety of CPV leaders and Government officials, including authorities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, and other offices in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and the provinces.

The Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and staff traveled to various regions of the country on five occasions between 2003 and 2005 to meet religious leaders and government authorities. During an extended visit to Hanoi in March 2005, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, together with the United States Mission in Vietnam, met with senior government officials from four ministries and conducted discussions about next steps after CPC designation. In these discussions, government officials explained the new, less restrictive legal regime it had put in place to govern religion in the country subsequent to CPC designation. Further, Government officials agreed to detail in writing the measures it was taking to ensure that these laws were being implemented throughout the country.

The National Security Council Senior Director for Asia and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor also raised religious freedom issues with government officials in the country during the period covered by this report. The U.S. Ambassador, the Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, and other Embassy and Consulate officers have raised religious freedom issues with senior cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister, two Deputy Prime Ministers, the Foreign Minister, other senior government officials, the head of the Office of Religious Affairs, Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Public Security, officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' External Relations Office in Ho Chi Minh City, chairpersons of Provincial People's Committees around the country, and other officials, particularly in the Central and Northwest Highlands. Embassy and Consulate General officials maintained regular contact with the key government offices responsible for respect for human rights. Embassy and Consulate General officers repeatedly informed government officials that a lack of progress on religious freedom and human rights was a significant impediment in the bilateral relationship.

The Ambassador and other Mission 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 urged greater freedom for recognized religious groups. The Ambassador and other Mission officers repeatedly advocated ending restrictions on Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do, among others. The Ambassador also requested that the Government investigate alleged abuses of religious believers and punish any officials found to be responsible. They, along with the Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, continued to urge an end to forced renunciations and the punishment of officials involved, and to call for the registration and re-opening of house churches that had been closed.

Representatives of the Embassy and the Consulate General have frequent contact with leaders of major religious communities, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Muslims. In November 2004, the Ambassador met with UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang while he was under conditions resembling house arrest at his pagoda, and in December, he met with UBCV monk Thich Quang Do. Consulate General officers maintained regular contact with these and other UBCV Buddhist monks. Embassy and Consulate General officers met with the cardinal of Ho Chi Minh City, the Catholic archbishops of Hue and Hanoi, and the bishops of Gia Lai, Kontum, Can Tho, Lang Son, Buon Ma Thuot, and Haiphong as well as other members of the Episcopal Conference. Embassy and Consulate General officers also met repeatedly with leaders of various Protestant house churches and with leaders of the Muslim community. When traveling outside of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Embassy and Consulate General officers regularly met with provincial Religious Affairs Committees, village elders, local clergy, and believers.

U.S. Government pressure may have had an immediate impact in some cases of imprisonment for religious reasons. Thirteen individuals raised by the United States as prisoners of concern for reasons connected to their faith were freed by the Government during the period covered by this report. In broader terms, some religious sources have cited diplomatic intervention, primarily from the United States, as a reason why the Government is seeking to legalize more religious groups and is allowing already legalized groups more freedom.

EUROPE AND EURASIA

ALBANIA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,100 square miles, and its population is approximately 3,144,058. It has a largely homogeneous ethnic population, consisting of Ghegs in the north and Tosks in the south. The ethnic Greek communities, the largest minority group in the country, are located in the south. Other small minorities include the Roma, the Egyptian community (an ethnic group similar to the Roma that does not speak the Roma language), Vlachs, and Macedonians.

The majority of citizens are secular in orientation after decades of rigidly enforced atheism under the Communist regime, which ended in 1990. Despite such secularism, most citizens traditionally associate themselves with a religious group. Citizens of Muslim background make up the largest traditional religious group (estimated at 65 to 70 percent of the population) and are divided into two communities: those associated with a moderate form of Sunni Islam and those associated with the Bektashi school (a particularly liberal form of Shi'a Sufism). Recently, the Muslim community, known as the Albanian Muslim Community, resumed using its historical name of the Albanian Islamic Community. In 1925, after the revolution of Ataturk and the Bektashi's expulsion from Turkey, the country became the world center of Bektashism, although it has not been recognized as such by the Government. Bektashis are estimated to represent approximately one quarter of the country's Muslim population.

The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania (referred to as Orthodox) and the Roman Catholic Church are the other large denominations. An estimated 20 to 25 percent of the population belongs to communities that are traditionally Albanian Orthodox, and approximately 10 percent are Roman Catholics. The Orthodox Church became independent from Constantinople's authority in 1929 but was not recognized as autocephalous (independent) until 1937. The Church's 1954 statute states that all its archbishops must have Albanian citizenship; however, the current archbishop is a Greek citizen who is still seeking Albanian citizenship.

Muslims are found throughout the country but are concentrated mostly in the middle of the country and to a lesser extent in the south. The Orthodox live mainly in the south, and Roman Catholics in the north of the country; however, this division is not strict, particularly in the case of many urban centers, which have mixed populations. The Greek minority, concentrated in the south, belongs almost exclusively to the Orthodox Church. No data are available on active participation in formal religious services, but estimates indicate that 30 to 40 percent of the population practices a religion. Foreign religious representatives, including Muslim clerics, Christian and Baha'i missionaries, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and many others freely carry out religious activities.

According to the State Committee on Cults, during the period covered by this report, there were approximately 17 different Muslim societies and groups active in the country; some of these groups were foreign. There were 30 Christian societies,

not including evangelical groups, representing more than 74 different organizations. Additionally, there are 571 Christian, Baha'i and Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries, and 379 Catholic and 115 Muslim missionaries. The largest foreign missionary groups were American, British, Italian, Greek, and Arab.

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. According to the 1998 Constitution, there is no official religion and all religions are equal; however, the predominant religious communities (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic) enjoy a greater degree of official recognition (e.g., national holidays) and social status based on their historical presence in the country. All registered religious groups have the right to hold bank accounts and to own property and buildings. Official holidays include religious holy days from all four predominant faiths. Religious movements may acquire the official status of a juridical person by registering with the Tirana District Court under the Law on Nonprofit Organizations, which recognizes the status of a nonprofit association regardless of whether the organization has a cultural, recreational, religious, or humanitarian character. The Government does not require registration or licensing of religious groups; however, the State Committee on Cults maintains records and statistics on foreign religious organizations that contact it for assistance. No groups reported difficulties registering during the period covered by this report. All religious communities have criticized the Government for its unwillingness to grant them tax-exempt status. Since 2003, foreign religious missionaries have been exempted from the residence permit tax.

The State Committee on Cults is charged with regulating the relations between the Government and all religious communities, large and small. The Chairman of the Committee has the status of a deputy minister and answers directly to the Prime Minister. The Committee recognizes the equality of religious communities and respects their independence. The Committee is charged with working to protect freedom of religion and to promote interreligious cooperation and understanding. The Committee claims that its records on religious organizations facilitate the granting of residence permits by police to foreign employees of various religious organizations. No organization claimed that the Committee did not facilitate access to residency permits during the period covered by this report. In 2004, the State Committee on Cults assisted 1,084 foreigners in obtaining residency permits.

There is no law or regulation forcing religious organizations to notify the Committee of their activities; however, Article 10 of the Constitution calls for separate bilateral agreements to regulate relations between the Government and religious communities. In the period covered by this report, the Government drafted separate bilateral agreements with the four predominant religious communities (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic). To date, only the Catholics have finalized their bilateral agreement with the Government. It is expected the other bilateral agreements will be finalized in 2005.

Additionally, the State Committee on Cults drafted a law on religion to deal with all religious communities according to a common standard; however, no action had been taken on the draft by the end of the period covered by this report.

In December 2004, the Government hosted a regional summit with the heads of states from Southeast Europe to promote interethnic and interreligious dialogue. In March 2005, in a ceremony organized by the nonprofit group Religions for Peace, the four predominant religious communities signed a statement of shared moral commitment. Under this initiative, the religious leaders committed themselves to promoting tolerance, coexistence, and respect for other faiths. According to official figures, there are 14 religious-affiliated schools in the country, with approximately 2,600 students. The Ministry of Education has the right to approve the curricula of religious-affiliated schools to ensure their compliance with national education standards, and the State Committee on Cults oversees implementation.

In January 2005, a new Roman Catholic-affiliated university with 200 students, the Lady of Good Counsel, was opened in Tirana. Additionally, the Government made a verbal commitment to allow the development of a Muslim-affiliated university.

There are 85 vocational training centers with approximately 6,000 students administered by religious communities. Some organizations described difficulty in registering religious-affiliated schools. As a result, religious-affiliated schools and vocational training centers continued to operate either as unregistered religious schools or converted to a secular curriculum or were closed. The Government reported the closing of several schools because they were unregistered or had changed the activi-

ties for which they were registered. Inspections by the Ministry of Education resulted in the closure of 12 religious-affiliated schools and kindergartens.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government is secular. The Ministry of Education asserts that public schools in the country are secular and that the law prohibits ideological and religious indoctrination. Religion is not taught in public schools. No restriction is imposed on families regarding the way they raise their children with respect to religious practices.

In 1967, the Communist government banned all religious practices and expropriated the property of the established Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic, and other churches. The Government has not returned all the properties and religious objects under its control that were confiscated during the Communist regime. In cases in which religious buildings were returned, the Government often failed to return the land that surrounds the buildings, sometimes because of redevelopment claims by private individuals who began farming it or using it for other purposes. The Government does not have the resources to compensate churches adequately for the extensive damage many religious properties suffered. Although it has recovered some confiscated property, including one large parcel of land near Tirana's main square where construction of a cathedral is under way, the Orthodox Church has claimed delays in local approvals for construction of churches and other buildings associated with the Church. Further, the Orthodox Church claims a lack of action on a number of other property claims throughout the country, as well as difficulty in recovering some religious icons for restoration and safekeeping.

The Roman Catholic community also has outstanding property claims but was able to consecrate a new cathedral in central Tirana in 2002 on land provided by the Government as compensation for other land confiscated during the Communist era. The Sunni Muslim and Bektashi communities have also requested that the Government return a number of religious properties, including, in the case of the former, a large parcel of land located across from the Parliament building in the center of Tirana on which a mosque once stood. However, the new Urban Regulatory Plan for Tirana sets aside land for a new mosque in another location. The Islamic community does not approve of this location, nor has it received permission to build a mosque in the approved location. The Bektashi community is also seeking compensation from the Government for victims of religious prosecution during the Communist regime.

In July 2004, Parliament approved a new law on the restitution and compensation of properties confiscated during the Communist regime. According to the new law, religious communities have the same rights as private individuals in matters of property restitution or compensation. However, the religious communities question the law's limitation on property restitution to 150 acres. The Government has not established a monetary fund for compensation.

The Albanian Evangelical Alliance, an association of approximately 98 Protestant churches throughout the country, claimed that it encountered obstacles in accessing the media. However, Evangelical Alliance representatives stated that it was not clear whether the limited access was due to the organization's small size or to its religious affiliation. The growing evangelical community has expanded its relationship with the country's various public institutions such as the universities.

In response to media reports alleging because of their teachings, Jehovah's Witnesses were responsible for a recent series of juvenile suicides (see Section III), the state police announced all "suspicious sects" in the country would be investigated and examined. At the time of this report, no such "suspicious sects" had been investigated or examined. The Government also banned the dissemination of religious literature in "public places." The Government provided no definition of "public places," but it is assumed this ban refers to public schools and government facilities.

There were few Jews in the country before WWII. During WWII, many Jews from other countries found shelter in the country, but almost all emigrated to Israel after 1991. There are believed to be fewer than 100 Jews left in the country, and there were no reports of synagogues or community centers functioning in the country.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Society is largely secular. Intermarriage among members of different religions is extremely common. Religious communities take pride in the tolerance and understanding that prevail among them.

Early in 2005, some elements of the media repeatedly attacked the Jehovah's Witnesses community, alleging their influence in a recent series of juvenile suicides. These accusations led to increased incidents of intimidation and threats of violence against Jehovah's Witnesses. Other religious communities expressed similar problems after the media attack on the Jehovah's Witnesses community. Additionally, the media also alleged that the death of two Muslim men while preparing explosives was related to their membership in the Islamic community.

The investigation regarding the 2003 killing of Sali Tivari, the former General Secretary of the Islamic Community, was ongoing.

Representatives of the Orthodox Church expressed concerns that some churches, crosses, and other buildings were the targets of vandalism, although these incidents were isolated and believed to be the result of weaknesses in the country's public order mechanisms rather than due to religious intolerance.

In June 2004, Kastriot Myftari, author of the book "Albanian National Islamism," was acquitted of all charges of inciting religious hatred.

Unlike in some previous years, the Bektashi community did not experience intimidation, threats, vandalism or violence.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government has employed numerous initiatives to further religious freedom and tolerance. The U.S. Embassy continues to urge the Government to address outstanding religious property claims and to return church lands to the denominations that lost them under Communist rule. Embassy officers, including the Chief of Mission, meet frequently (both in formal office calls and at representational events) with the heads of the major religious communities in the country.

The Embassy has been active in urging tolerance and moderation as a continued hallmark of society. The Embassy has provided grants to local organizations to promote interfaith tolerance and understanding and to support the teaching of civic affairs and religious tolerance in secondary schools, including schools operated by faith-based organizations. Projects that support inter-faith understanding and that strengthen civic education in religious-affiliated schools help ensure that tradition is preserved as forms of Islam and Christianity, new to the country, seek to take root.

In July 2004, a group of religious leaders participated in a three-week International Visitor's program to gather insight into the nature of religious diversity in the U.S., including the educational role of religious institutions and the mechanisms through which religious communities play a positive role in a vibrant civil society.

From September 2004 through April 2005, using an Embassy grant, the "Civic and Faith-based Education Project" continued to expand its activities throughout the country bringing together local authorities, teachers, students, religious leaders, and civil society representatives to discuss ways of cultivating values that can contribute to a more democratic, diverse and tolerant society.

The project also extended cooperation with the Education Department of the Albanian Islamic community, which, as a result, introduced constructive, cooperative civic education curricula into Muslim-affiliated high schools in Tirana. The project seeks to replicate this experience in other Muslim-affiliated high schools throughout the country.

The Embassy also continued to support the project "Tolerance Days in Religious Schools" through which secular and religious community leaders, government officials, and others explored how to strengthen mutual understanding among faiths. The U.S. Government continued funding for a project on fostering religious tolerance. This 2-year project started in May 2004 and seeks to support the peaceful co-existence of different religious groups and to foster greater understanding among persons of different faiths.

ANDORRA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the Constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, which receives some privileges not available to other religious groups.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 180.7 square miles and a population of approximately 76,875 (December 2004 figure). Very few official statistics are available relative to religion; however, traditionally approximately 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. The population consists largely of immigrants, with full citizens representing less than 30 percent of the total. The immigrants, who primarily are from Spain, Portugal, and France, also largely are Roman Catholic. It is estimated that, of the Catholic population, approximately half are active church attendees. Other religious groups include Muslims (who predominantly are represented among the approximately 2,000 North African immigrants and are split between two groups, one more fundamentalist); Hinduism; the New Apostolic Church; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); several Protestant denominations, including the Anglican Church; the Reunification Church; and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Foreign missionaries are active and operate without restriction. For example, the Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses proselytize from door to door.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church "in accordance with Andorran tradition" and recognizes the "full legal capacity" of the bodies of the Catholic Church, granting them legal status "in accordance with their own rules." One of the two constitutionally designated princes of the country (who serves equally as joint head of state with the President of France) is Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicília of the Spanish town of La Seu d'Urgell. The Catholic religious celebration on September 8 of the "Verge de Meritxell" (Virgin of Meritxell) is also a national holiday. The celebration does not negatively affect any religious group.

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

The authorities reportedly had expressed some concern regarding what treatment groups whose actions may be considered injurious to public health, safety, morals, or order should receive. The law does not limit any such groups, although it does contain a provision that no one may be "forced to join or remain in an association against his/her will."

In spite of negotiations between the Muslim community and the Government, no mosque had been built. However, the Muslim community practices its religion without restriction in places of worship scattered throughout the country.

Instruction in the tenets of the Catholic faith is available in public schools on an optional basis, outside of both regular school hours and the time frame set aside for elective school activities, such as civics or ethics. The Catholic Church provides teachers for religion classes, and the Government pays their salaries. The Cultural Islamic Center provides some 50 students with Arabic lessons. The Government and the Moroccan community have not yet found a system that would allow children to receive Arabic classes in school outside of the regular school day.

The Government has been responsive to certain needs of the Muslim community. On occasion the Government has made public facilities available to various religious organizations for religious activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of 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 persons to be returned to the United States.

An estimated 100 Jews live in the country. Five years ago, the Jewish community opened a synagogue and a cultural center. The group has suffered no discrimination and is well integrated into the overall society.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

Under the sponsorship of the Foreign Minister, a group of people attended a meeting organized for the first time among Catholics, Buddhist, Hindus, and Muslims and that was presided over by the Bishop of Seu d'Urgell Joan Enric Vives i Sicilia.

UNESCO has started an inter-religious dialogue in the country. The project is expected to consist of various meetings to promote peace and reconciliation among members of different religions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Societal attitudes between and among different religious groups appear to be amicable and tolerant. For example, the Catholic Church of la Massana lends its sanctuary twice per month to the Anglican community, so that visiting Anglican clergy can conduct services for the English-speaking community. Although those who practice religions other than Roman Catholicism tend to be immigrants and otherwise not integrated fully into the local community, there appears to be little or no obstacle to their practicing their own religions.

There are no significant ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

According to a report of the European Commission on Andorra, the country has no problems related to discrimination but the society has racial prejudices, an issue that could grow if the economic situation worsens.

An opinion poll published in 2003 by the Institute of Andorran Studies on the "values and traditions of the Andorran Society," indicated that 52 percent see themselves as "very religious people."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Both the U.S. Ambassador, resident in Madrid, and the Consul General, resident in Barcelona, have met with Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicilia, the leader of the Catholic community, to discuss religious toleration. The Consul General specifically discussed with and urged the Foreign Minister to take a more pro-active stance in integrating the Muslim community into society.

ARMENIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law places some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of minority faiths, and there were some restrictions in practice. The Armenian Apostolic Church, which has formal legal status as the national church, enjoys some privileges not available to adherents of other religious groups.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. According to legislation passed in 2003, the Law on Alternative Military Service took effect on June 1, 2004, and the Government al-

lowed subsequent draftees and conscientious objectors currently in prison to apply for an alternative to military service. The law provides “conscientious objectors” the opportunity to serve in either noncombat military or civil service duties instead of as conscripted military personnel, subject to government panel approval. In October 2004, the Government granted the Jehovah’s Witnesses formal registration as a religious organization. Some denominations report occasional acts of discrimination by mid- or low-level government officials.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, societal attitudes toward some minority religious groups are ambivalent.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 18,520 square miles, and its population is approximately 3 million.

The country is ethnically homogeneous, with approximately 98 percent of the population classified as ethnic Armenian. Many Azeris left Armenia during the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh from 1988 to 1994, increasing the country’s religious and ethnic homogeneity. Approximately 90 percent of citizens nominally belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, an Eastern Christian denomination whose spiritual center is located at the cathedral and monastery of Etchmiadzin. The head of the Church, Catholicos Garegin II (alternate spelling Karekin), was elected in 1999 at Etchmiadzin with the participation of Armenian delegates from around the world. Religious observance was strongly discouraged in the Soviet era, leading to a sharp decline in the number of active churches and priests, the closure of virtually all monasteries, and the nearly complete absence of religious education. As a result, the number of active religious practitioners is relatively low. For many citizens, Christian identity is an ethnic trait, with only a loose connection to religious belief.

There are comparatively small, but growing, communities of other faiths. There was no reliable system in place for compiling accurate census data on religious minorities and reports from congregants themselves varied significantly. The Government does not provide official figures for religious adherents, but congregants offered the following unconfirmed estimates: Catholic, both Roman and Mekhitarist (Armenian Uniate) (180,000); Yezidi, an ethnically Kurdish cultural group whose religion includes elements derived from Zoroastrianism, Islam, and animism (40,000 nominal adherents); unspecified “charismatic” Christian (22,700); Jehovah’s Witnesses (8,500); Armenian Evangelical Church (5,000); Baptist (2,000); the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (2,000); Greek Orthodox (1,200); Seventh-day Adventist (950); Pentecostal (700); Jewish (500 to 1,000), and Baha’i (more than 200).

There are no estimates of the number of atheists in the country. Yezidis are concentrated primarily in agricultural areas around Mount Aragats, northwest of the capital, Yerevan. Armenian Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christians are concentrated in the northern region, while most Jews, Mormons, and Baha’i are located in Yerevan. In Yerevan, there is a small community of Muslims, including Kurds, Iranians, and temporary residents from the Middle East.

Several minority religious groups sponsor missionary programs in the country, including both expatriate and local participants. Jehovah’s Witnesses estimated an increase in membership of approximately 1,000 adherents, while membership in all other minority religions remained relatively unchanged.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law specifies some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of faiths other than the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Constitution also provides for freedom of conscience, including the right either to believe or to adhere to atheism. The 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience, amended in 1997, establishes the separation of church and state but grants the Armenian Apostolic Church official status as the national church.

Extended negotiations between the Government and the Armenian Apostolic Church resulted in a 2000 memorandum providing a framework for the two sides to negotiate a concordat. Although they have not yet concluded negotiations, the Government and the Armenian Apostolic Church used the memorandum as a basis for dispute resolution, resulting in the return of several monasteries to church control and several policy agreements.

The law requires all religious denominations and organizations to register to operate without restrictions. The Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities, which replaced the former Council on Religious Affairs (CRA), oversees religious affairs and coordinates activities with the cabinet's Chief of Staff. A high-ranking official from the former CRA serves as the Prime Minister's Advisor on Religious Affairs. The Office of the State Registrar registers religious entities, and the Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities performs a consultative role in the registration process. To qualify for registration, petitioning organizations must "be free from materialism and of a purely spiritual nature," and must subscribe to a doctrine based on "historically recognized holy scriptures." A religious organization must have at least 200 adult members. Religious groups are not required to register, but unregistered religious organizations may not publish newspapers or magazines, rent meeting places, broadcast programs on television or radio, or officially sponsor the visas of visitors. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had registered 56 religious organizations, some of which are individual congregations from within the same denomination.

Yerevan's one surviving 18th century mosque, which was restored with Iranian funding, is open for regular Friday prayers. The Government does not create any obstacles for Muslims to pray there, despite the fact that the mosque is not officially registered as a religious facility.

The law permits religious education in state schools. Only personnel authorized and trained by the Government may teach in schools. The history of the Armenian Apostolic Church forms the basis of this curriculum; many schools cover global religions in elementary school and the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church in middle school. Students may choose not to attend religious education classes. Religious groups are not allowed to provide religious instruction in schools, although registered groups may do so in private homes to children of their members. On occasion, priests from the Armenian Apostolic Church teach classes in religious history; however, the use of public school buildings for religious "indoctrination" is illegal.

The Government's Human Rights Ombudsman and the head of the Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities met with many religious minority organizations during the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, most registered religious groups reported no serious legal impediments to their activities. However, the 1991 law prohibits "proselytizing" (undefined in the law) and restricts unregistered groups from publishing, broadcasting, or inviting official visitors to the country. The prohibition on proselytizing applies to all groups, including the Armenian Apostolic Church; however, the term used for proselytizing implies that someone has been taken away from a "true" faith and the prohibition effectively restricts only minority religious groups.

In October 2004, the Government registered the Jehovah's Witnesses, following many previous unsuccessful attempts. Both government representatives and group leaders expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the registration process. In the past, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were allowed to bring in small quantities of printed materials for their own use. Registration allows the group to import large quantities of material.

According to the head of the Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities, some minority religious groups including the Molokans and some Yezidi groups, which might number in the hundreds, have not sought registration.

Although the law prohibits foreign funding for foreign-based churches, the Government has not enforced this ban and considers it unenforceable. A 1991 law required all religious organizations, except the Armenian Apostolic Church, to obtain prior permission to engage in public religious activities, travel abroad, or invite foreign guests to the country. This law was reversed by Presidential Order in 2001 and, in practice, no travel restrictions were imposed on any religious denomination.

No action has been taken against missionaries. Religious groups did not report any investigations of missionaries during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Law on Alternative Military Service took effect on June 1 and was applied to subsequent draftees and those currently serving prison terms for draft evasion. According to Jehovah's Witnesses leaders in Yerevan, 14 members of their religious group remained in prison for their refusal of military service on conscientious and religious grounds. Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses stated that all of the prisoners had been given the opportunity to serve an alternative to military service rather than prison time, but that all refused because alternative service was admin-

istered under the control of the military. Six of those currently in prison reportedly received the maximum sentence of 2 years.

There are reports that hazing of new conscripts is more severe for minority groups such as the Yezidis and Jehovah's Witnesses. There was one report that a new recruit loosely affiliated with the Jehovah's Witnesses was struck by an officer after he claimed conscientious objection to military service. The recruit's representative said he was protected from physical harm by his commanding officer, but he eventually deserted.

Other than Jehovah's Witnesses who were conscientious objectors, 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, societal attitudes toward some minority religions are ambivalent.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is a member of the World Council of Churches and, despite doctrinal differences, has friendly official relations with major Christian denominations, including the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and some Protestant churches.

Suppressed through 70 years of Soviet rule, the Armenian Apostolic Church has trained priests and committed material resources to fill immediately the spiritual void created by the demise of Communist ideology. Nontraditional religious organizations are viewed with suspicion. Representatives of foreign-based denominations frequently cited statements including "one God, one country, one church," noting they had been warned against "stealing souls" from the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Societal attitudes toward most minority religions are ambivalent. Many citizens are not religiously observant, but the link between religion and Armenian ethnicity is strong.

According to some observers, the general population expressed negative attitudes about Jehovah's Witnesses, because they refused to serve in the military, engaged in little understood proselytizing practices, and because of a widespread but unsubstantiated belief that they pay the desperately poor to convert. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to be targets of hostile sermons by some Armenian Apostolic Church clerics and experienced occasional societal discrimination. The press reported a number of complaints lodged by citizens against members of Jehovah's Witnesses for allegedly illegal proselytizing.

There was no officially sponsored violence reported against minority religious groups during the period covered by this report. Yezidi children on occasion reported hazing by teachers and classmates. Some observers reported increasingly unfavorable attitudes toward members of Jehovah's Witnesses among the general population because they are seen as "unpatriotic" for refusing military service. Unlike in previous years, the local arm of the Jehovah's Witnesses reported no violence against their community.

The Jewish community reported incidents of verbal harassment during the period covered by this report, but members noted that the frequency of incidents decreased from previous years. Following his calls for the country to be "purified" of Jews and Yezidis, the leader of the Union of Armenian Aryans, a small, ultranationalist group, was arrested on charges of "public incitement to national, racial, and religious hostility," and subsequently convicted. In March 2005, a court issued a 3-year suspended sentence. The director of ALM TV frequently made anti-Semitic remarks on the air.

In May, Jewish groups complained to government authorities about the distribution of anti-Semitic literature. Authorities said the imported literature apparently violated the Law on Distributing Literature Inflaming National Hatred and recommended that the groups file a complaint with the Prosecutor General's office. However, neither police nor Jewish groups were able to identify the importers, and Jewish leaders had not taken any formal action by year's end.

On September 17, 2004, offices of the Jewish community in Yerevan received a message that vandals had damaged the local memorial to the victims of the Holo-

caust. Several photographs of the memorial were taken, and the vandalism was reported immediately to the local police, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the government-owned television channel. A television crew arrived at the site together with an official from the Jewish community in Yerevan and discovered that the memorial had been wiped clean, apparently by the park guard. There was no further investigation into the incident.

Some Yezidi leaders reported that police and local authorities subjected their religious community to discrimination. Other Yezidi leaders denied the allegations.

Although it is difficult to document, there is some informal societal discrimination in employment against members of certain minority religious groups.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and Embassy officials maintain close contact with the Catholicos at Etchmiadzin and with leaders of other major religious and ecumenical groups in the country. During the period covered by this report, U.S. officials consistently raised the issue of alternatives to military service and registration of the Jehovah's Witnesses with government officials. The Embassy also maintains regular contact with traveling regional representatives of foreign-based religious groups such as the Mormons and raises their concerns with the Government. Embassy officials closely monitor trials related to issues of religious freedom and take an active role in policy forums and non-governmental organization roundtables regarding religious freedom.

The U.S. Embassy hosted several roundtable meetings and receptions in honor of U.S. representatives of religious organizations. Leaders of local minority religious groups were regularly welcomed at these events.

AUSTRIA

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; however, there is some societal mistrust and discrimination against members of some nonrecognized religious groups, particularly those referred to as "sects." There was no marked deterioration in the atmosphere of religious tolerance in the country during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 32,382 square miles, and its population is an estimated 8 million. The largest minority groups are Croatian, Slovene, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, and Roma. In the past several years, the country has experienced a rise in immigration from countries such as Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has increased the number of Muslims in the country.

According to the 2001 census, membership in major religions is as follows: Roman Catholic Church—74.0 percent; Lutheran and Presbyterian churches (Evangelical Church—Augsburger and Helvetic confessions)—4.7 percent; Islamic community—4.2 percent; Jewish community—0.1 percent; Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian)—2.2 percent; other Christian churches—0.9 percent; other non-Christian religious groups—0.2 percent. Atheists accounted for 12 percent; 2 percent did not indicate a religious affiliation.

The vast majority of groups termed "sects" by the Government are small organizations with fewer than 100 members. Among the larger groups are the Church of Scientology, with between 5,000 and 6,000 members, and the Unification Church, with approximately 700 adherents throughout the country. Other groups found in the country include Divine Light Mission, Eckankar, Hare Krishna, the Holosophic community, the Osho movement, Sahaja Yoga, Sai Baba, Sri Chinmoy, Transcendental Meditation, Landmark Education, the Center for Experimental Society Formation, Fiat Lux, Universal Life, and The Family.

The provinces of Carinthia and Burgenland have somewhat higher percentages of Protestants than the national average. The number of Muslims is higher than the national average in Vienna and the province of Vorarlberg, where industry drew a disproportionately higher number of guest workers from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia.

According to a poll by FESSEL–GfK 78 percent of respondents said that they belonged to a church or religious group. Of that number, 2 percent attended services more than once a week, 15 percent attended weekly, 17 percent attended a minimum of once a month, 34 percent attended several times a year (on special occasions), and 32 percent never attended.

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 is secular. The Roman Catholic Church is the predominant religion; many Roman Catholic holy days are also government holidays.

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

Recognition as a religious society under the 1874 law has wide-ranging implications, such as the authority to participate in the mandatory church contributions program, to provide religious instruction in public schools, and to bring religious workers into the country to act as ministers, missionaries, or teachers. Under the 1874 law, religious societies have “public corporation” status. This status permits religious societies to engage in a number of public or quasi-public activities that are denied to confessional communities and associations. The Government provides financial support for religious teachers at both public and private schools to religious societies but not to other religious organizations. The Government provides financial support to private schools run by any of the 13 officially recognized religious societies.

The Government recognizes 13 religious bodies as religious societies: the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant churches (Lutheran and Presbyterian, called “Augsburger” and “Helvetic” confessions), the Islamic community, the Old Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the New Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Methodist Church of Austria, the Buddhist community, and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities imposed new criteria on religious groups to achieve religious society status, although it allowed previously recognized societies to retain their status. New criteria included a 20-year period of existence (at least 10 of which must be as a group organized as a confessional community under the 1998 law) and membership equaling at least two one-thousandths of the country’s population (approximately 16,000 persons). Only 4 of the 13 recognized religious groups would meet this membership requirement. Of nonrecognized religious groups, only the Jehovah’s Witnesses met this latter membership requirement.

The 1998 law allows nonrecognized religious groups to seek official status as “confessional communities” without the fiscal and educational privileges available to recognized religions. To apply, groups must have at least 300 members and submit to the Government their written statutes describing the goals, rights, and obligations of members, as well as membership regulations, officials, and financing. Groups also must submit a written version of their religious doctrine, which must differ from that of any religious society recognized under the 1874 law or any confessional community established under the 1998 law. The Ministry of Education then examines the doctrine for a determination that the group’s basic beliefs do not violate public security, public order, health and morals, or the rights and freedoms of citizens.

Once the Government recognizes them, religious confessional communities have juridical standing, which permits them to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in their own names and contracting for goods and services. A religious group that seeks to obtain this new status is subject to a 6-month waiting period from the time of application to the Ministry of Education and Culture. According

to the Ministry, as of July 2005, 13 groups had applied for the status of religious confessional community, and 10 were granted the new status. The Church of Scientology and the Hindu Mandir Association withdrew their applications. The Hindu Mandir Association reapplied under the name Hindu Religious Community and was granted the new status. The Ministry rejected the application of the Sahaja Yoga group in 1998. Since then, its decision has been upheld in the Constitutional Court and Administrative Court.

The 10 religious groups that constitute confessional communities according to the law are the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baha'i Faith, the Baptists, the Evangelical Alliance, the Movement for Religious Renewal, the Free Christian Community (Pentecostals), the Pentecostal Community of God, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Hindu Religious Community, and the Mennonites.

Religious groups that do not qualify for either religious society or confessional community status may apply to become associations under the Law of Associations. Associations are corporations under law and have many of the same rights as confessional communities, including the right to own real estate. Some groups have organized as associations, even while applying for recognition as religious societies.

In May 2005, the Jewish Community (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde, or IKG) and the Government announced that pending questions regarding the IKG's restitution claims had been resolved. The solution included addressing IKG concerns regarding ongoing financing of the community's security costs and social programs.

The Government strictly enforces its anti-neo-Nazi legislation, which prohibits neo-Nazi acts, including incitement to neo-Nazi activity and the glorification of National Socialism. The Government also provides police protection for Jewish Community institutions. Investigations into the unlawfulness of an October 2004 gathering by right-wing extremists in the Carinthian city of Feldkirchen were ongoing as of June 30, 2005. Speakers at the gathering stated that the "enemy is and remains the Jew." The case was in the hands of the Carinthian public prosecutor, with a report expected by late 2005.

Holocaust education was generally taught as part of history instruction but also was featured in other subjects under the heading "political education (civics)." Religious education classes were another forum for teaching the tenets of different religions and overall tolerance. Special teacher training seminars were available on the subject of Holocaust education. The Education Ministry also ran a program through which Holocaust survivors talked to school classes about National Socialism and the Holocaust.

There are no restrictions on missionary activities. Although in the past nonrecognized religious groups had problems obtaining resident permits for foreign religious workers, administrative procedures adopted in 1997 addressed this problem in part. Visas for religious workers of recognized religions are not subject to a numerical quota. Visas for religious workers who are members of nonrecognized religions are subject to a numerical cap. The Austrian Evangelical Alliance, the umbrella organization for nonrecognized Christian organizations, continued to report that in some urban centers, particularly Vienna and some cities in Lower Austria, the number of available visas was not sufficient to meet demand.

In 2003, the Government opened the first Buddhist cemetery in Europe within Vienna's Central Cemetery. As of December 2004, construction continued on the new Islamic Cemetery in Vienna's Liesing district.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Numerous religious groups that the Government did not recognize under the 1998 law, as well as some religious law experts, dismiss the benefits of obtaining status under the 1998 law and have complained that the law's additional criteria for recognition as a religious society obstruct claims to recognition and formalize a second-class status for nonrecognized groups. Some experts have questioned the 1998 law's constitutionality.

Although the Ministry of Education granted Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a confessional community in 1998, they were denied recognition as a religious society under the 1874 law in 1997. A complaint filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses with the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) in 1998, arguing that the group had not yet been granted full status as a religious entity in the country under the law, despite a 2-decade struggle, remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Ministry for Social Security and Generations and the City of Vienna fund a counseling center of a controversial nongovernmental organization (NGO), The Society against Sect and Cult Dangers or "GSK," that actively works against sects and cults. GSK distributes information to schools and the general public and runs a

counseling center for those who believe they have been negatively affected by cults or sects.

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

Several provinces funded offices that provided information on sects and cults. The website of the Family Office of the Government of Lower Austria no longer included a presentation that negatively characterized many religious groups. On May 27, 2005, Parliament passed an animal protection law prohibiting the slaughtering of animals without anesthesia. For ritual slaughtering, the law permits post-cut anesthesia; in addition, the ritual slaughtering must be carried out by "specially trained" and experienced persons and take place in the presence of a veterinarian. The ruling was in force, and has been accepted by the Islamic and the Jewish communities.

The conservative People's Party (OVP) position regarding membership in a "sect" remained in force during the period covered by this report. Its stated position is that party membership is incompatible with membership in a "sect," if the sect holds a fundamentally different view of man from what the Party believes, advocates opinions irreconcilable with the ethical principles of the party, or rejects the basic rights granted by progressively minded constitutional states and an open society. In 1998, the OVP passed a resolution banning members of "sects" from being members of the party. This resolution was passed to target a native Scientologist who was at the time a respected member of his local party organization and his local community. There are no known reports of members of other sects being denied membership in the party.

Prisoners who belong to nonrecognized religious groups are entitled to pastoral care. Some groups have reported experiencing problems with access to pastoral care in isolated instances; however, there are no allegations of widespread problems.

The Government provides funding for religious instruction in public schools and places of worship for children belonging to any of the 13 officially recognized religious societies. The Government does not offer such funding to nonrecognized religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. In some cases, religious societies decide that the administrative cost of providing religious instruction is too great to warrant providing such courses in all schools. Attendance in religious instruction is mandatory unless students formally withdraw at the beginning of the academic year; students under the age of 14 need parental permission to withdraw from instruction.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the 13 officially recognized religious societies are generally amicable. Fourteen Christian churches, among them the Roman Catholic Church, various Protestant confessions, and eight Orthodox and old-oriental churches are engaged in a dialogue in the framework of the Ecumenical Council of Austrian Churches. The Baptists and the Salvation Army have observer status in the Council. The international Catholic organization "Pro Oriente," which promotes a dialogue with the Orthodox churches, also is active in the country.

The NGO Forum against Anti-Semitism (Forum gegen Antisemitismus) reported 116 anti-Semitic incidents during the period covered by this report, including 4 physical attacks. The incidents included name-calling, graffiti/defacement, threatening letters, anti-Semitic Internet postings, property damage, vilifying letters and telephone calls, and physical attacks. The European Union's Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia has declared in the past that anti-Semitism in the country was characterized by diffuse and traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes rather than by acts of physical aggression.

There were two cases of belittlement or denial of the Holocaust in the spring of 2005. One politician publicly stated that former adherents of National Socialism had been discriminated against, while another said that there was not sufficient proof that gas chambers existed. These statements led to a firestorm of criticism, leading

to the eventual resignation of the former and a declaration by President Heinz Fischer that “such people do not have a place in our society.”

A March–April 2005 study conducted by the American Jewish Committee in the U.S. and six European countries showed that 42 percent of population believed that Jews were exploiting the memory of the Nazi extermination of Jews for their own purposes. In response to the study’s results, the President of the IKG said that anti-Semitism in the country was not greater than in other countries, but he also said that the situation was not “especially good” either.

The Anti-Defamation League’s April 2004 report measured attitudes towards Jews, Israel, and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in 10 European countries, including the country, with reference to 11 anti-Semitic stereotypes. The survey considered those respondents who agreed with six or more stereotypic statements to harbor anti-Semitic views. The results of the 2004 survey showed that, according to the above criteria, 17 percent harbor anti-Semitic views. This was 2 percent less than the 2002 survey results.

There were no reports of violence or vigilante action against members of religious minorities. However, some societal mistrust and discrimination continues against members of some nonrecognized religious groups, particularly against those considered to be members of sects. A large portion of the public perceives such groups as exploiting the vulnerable for monetary gain, recruiting and brainwashing youth, promoting antidemocratic ideologies, and denying the legitimacy of government authority. Some observers believe the existence of and the activities of the Federal Office of Sect Issues and similar offices at the state level foster societal discrimination against minority religious groups.

Members of sects continued to complain that the Government lacks an objective stance when dealing with or representing groups they consider to be “sects.” The sects claimed that the Government relies too heavily on isolated cases of persons who have had negative experiences with a group, rather than speaking directly to the vast majority of members who are content.

The Church of Scientology has reported that individual Scientologists have experienced discrimination in hiring.

Muslims have complained about incidents of societal discrimination and verbal harassment. In response to past incidents of Muslim schoolgirls encountering difficulties with school authorities for wearing the headscarf at school, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture circulated a policy document in June 2004 to all schools under its jurisdiction emphasizing that the wearing of the headscarf is protected by the right to freedom of religion under the Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights. It further stated that any efforts designed to prohibit Muslim schoolgirls from wearing it are unlawful.

Muslim women have reported difficulties in the job market when potential employers learn they wear a headscarf. Observers hoped victims would be able to use the Equal Treatment Bill, which implemented the EU Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Guidelines and took effect on July 1, 2004, to take action in court. Women who wear the headscarf have also reported that they experienced harassment in public areas.

No Muslim cemeteries were desecrated during the period covered by this report. Compulsory school curricula provide for anti-bias and tolerance education as part of the civics education and as a focus across various subjects, including history and German classes. The Ministry of Education also conducts training projects with the Anti-Defamation League in this context.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

Embassy officials regularly meet with government officials, NGOs, and leaders of religious organizations to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country. American representatives repeatedly voice their concerns to the Government on the strict requirements for religious recognition in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy maintained an active dialogue with members of the Jewish and Muslim Communities, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Scientology, and other religious groups.

The Embassy highlighted religious freedom and tolerance in its programs. In September 2004, an Embassy-nominated Turkish-Austrian and Sudanese-Austrian, both Muslims, participated in the International Visitors Program to study "Managing Religious Diversity in a Multi-Ethnic Society."

AZERBAIJAN

The Constitution provides that persons of all faiths may choose and practice their religion without restrictions; however, there were some abuses and restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Some religious groups reported delays in and denials of registration and limitations upon their ability to import religious literature. Others have indicated that they either received or expect to receive their registration, they are able to import religious literature, and they meet without government interference. However, local authorities occasionally monitor religious services, and officials at times harassed nontraditional religious groups.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is popular prejudice against Muslims who convert to non-Islamic faiths and hostility towards groups that proselytize, particularly evangelical Christian and missionary groups.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy is engaged actively in monitoring religious freedom and maintains contact with the Government and a wide range of religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

According to official figures, the country has a total area of 33,774 square miles, and its population is approximately 8 million. There are no reliable statistics on memberships in various faiths; however, according to official figures approximately 96 percent of the population is Muslim. The rest of the population adheres to other faiths or consists of nonbelievers. Among the Muslim majority, religious observance is relatively low and Muslim identity tends to be based more on culture and ethnicity rather than religion. The Muslim population is approximately 70 percent Shi'a and 30 percent Sunni; differences traditionally have not been defined sharply.

The vast majority of the country's Christians are Russian Orthodox whose identity, like that of Muslims, tends to be based as much on culture and ethnicity as religion. Christians are concentrated in the urban areas of Baku and Sumgayit. Most of the country's Jews belong to one of two groups: the "Mountain Jews," descendants of Jews who sought refuge in the northern part of the country more than 2,000 years ago, and a smaller group of "Ashkenazi" Jews, descendants of European Jews who migrated to the country during Russian and Soviet rule.

These four groups (Shi'a, Sunni, Russian Orthodoxy, and Jews) are considered traditional religious groups. There also have been small congregations of Evangelical Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Molokans (Russian Orthodox Old-Believers), Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'is in the country for more than 100 years. In the last 10 years, a number of new religious groups considered foreign or nontraditional have been established, including "Wahhabi" Muslims, Pentecostal and evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hare Krishnas.

There are fairly sizeable expatriate Christian and Muslim communities in the capital city of Baku; authorities generally permit these groups to worship freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides that persons of all faiths may choose and practice their religion without restriction; however, there were some abuses and restrictions. Under the Constitution, each person has the right to choose and change his or her own religious affiliation and belief including atheism, to join or form the religious group of his or her choice, and to practice his or her religion. The Law on Religious Freedom (which is entitled, "On Freedom of Religious Beliefs") expressly prohibits the Government from interfering in the religious activities of any individual or

group; however, there are exceptions, including cases where the activity of a religious group “threatens public order and stability.”

A number of legal provisions enable the Government to regulate religious groups, including a requirement in the Law on Religious Freedom that religious organizations be registered by the Government. The State Committee for Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA), which replaced the Department of Religious Affairs in June 2001, assumed responsibility for the registration of religious groups from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Government authorities gave the SCWRA and its chairman, broad powers over registration; control over the publication, import, and distribution of religious literature; and the ability to suspend the activities of religious groups violating the law. In addition, Muslim religious groups must receive a letter of approval from the Caucasus Muslim Board (CMB) before they can be registered by the SCWRA.

Registration enables a religious organization to maintain a bank account, rent property, and generally act as a legal entity. Unregistered organizations are exposed to allegations that they are illegal and find it difficult, but not impossible, to function. The Baku City Government has attempted to use registration as a requirement to occupy religious buildings registered as historic landmarks. Unregistered groups were more vulnerable to attacks and closures by local authorities. In 2001, religious groups were called upon to re-register with the SCWRA; however, the registration process is burdensome, and there are frequent, lengthy delays in obtaining registration.

To register, religious groups must complete a seven-step application process that is arbitrary and restrictive. One of the primary complaints concerns the requirement to indicate a “religious center,” which requires additional approval by appropriate government authorities if the “center” is located outside the country. Board members also are required to provide their place of employment. Many groups have reported that SCWRA employees charged with handling registration-related paperwork repeatedly argued over the language in statutes and also instructed some groups on how to organize themselves. Religious groups are permitted to appeal registration denials to the courts. However, appellate court records for the period of this report cannot verify whether any appeals were adjudicated.

During the period covered by this report, the Government registered 63 religious groups. Since the call for re-registration, 320 groups have successfully registered, compared with 406 that were registered under the previous law. The majority of the registered groups were Muslim. The SCWRA estimates that 2,000 religious groups are in operation; many have not filed for registration or re-registration. The Muslim Juma Mosque community refuses to submit a complete re-registration package amid concern that provisions of the re-registration process would invite government interference in its ability to worship freely. The community argues that its 1993 registration should remain valid. One of the minority religious communities that has faced re-registration problems is the Baptist denomination. Of its five main churches, three have successfully re-registered; however, Baptist churches in Aliabad and Neftchala remain unregistered.

Under the Law on Religious Freedom political parties cannot engage in religious activity, and religious leaders are forbidden from seeking public office. Religious facilities may not be used for political purposes.

The Law on Religious Freedom, which the Government enforces, prohibits foreigners from proselytizing. On April 24, 2005, police authorities seized the religious literature of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Baku on these grounds. The law permits the production and dissemination of religious literature with the approval of the SCWRA; however, the authorities also appeared to selectively restrict individuals from importing and distributing religious materials. The procedure for obtaining permission to import religious literature remains burdensome, but religious organizations report that it is becoming more regular and that the SCWRA appears to be handling requests more effectively.

Registered Muslim organizations are subordinate to the Caucasus Muslim Board (CMB), a Soviet-era Muftiate, which appoints Muslim clerics to mosques, periodically monitors sermons, and organizes annual pilgrimages to Mecca for the Hajj. Although it remains the first point of control for Muslim groups wanting to register with the SCWRA according to the Law on Religious Freedom, it also has been subject to interference by the SCWRA, which has attempted to share control with the CMB over the appointment and certification of clerics and internal financial control of the country’s mosques. Some Muslim religious leaders object to interference from both the CMB and SCWRA.

Religious instruction is not mandatory in public schools. State education is separate from religion, but there is no restriction on teaching religion in schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted some religious freedoms during the period covered by this report. The SCWRA continued to delay or deny registration to a number of Protestant Christian groups, including two Baptist churches. At the end of the period covered by this report, the SCWRA had registered more than three-quarters of the number of religious communities previously registered. Some groups reported that SCWRA employees tried to interfere in the internal workings of their organizations during the registration process.

In addition, the Justice Ministry denied registration to a religious nongovernmental organization (NGO), the Azerbaijan Centre for Religion and Democracy. Human rights activists allege that the ministry denied the registration of this group because of its criticism of the official religious structures and to obstruct its activities.

Although unregistered religious groups continued to function, some, such as Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Baptists, reported official harassment, including break-ups of religious services and police intimidation, fines, and occasional beatings of worshippers by police. This harassment and restriction of religious freedom resulted in an atmosphere of fear among some non-traditional religious groups.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported that authorities regularly interfered with their ability to rent public halls for religious assemblies and, on occasion, fined or detained and beat individuals for meeting in private homes. For example, on June 12, police raided a gathering of approximately 200 Jehovah's Witnesses in Baku, detaining 29 members of the group and then releasing them after several hours in police custody. Local television stations have also at times been involved in capturing "raids" of religious meetings on film to document for "exposes" of religious groups.

Police also reportedly harassed and occasionally raided the meetings of other religious minorities including Seventh day Adventists in Ganja in November 2004.

The ethnic Azeri "Love" Baptist church reports that it continues to conduct religious services in partnership with its lawfully registered sister church, the Russian "Love" Baptist church, despite the SCWRA's continued denial of the Azeri group's application for registration; the SCWRA denied the church's most recent application in February 2004.

In 2003 in Nakhchivan, the authorities prevented the Adventist congregation from worshipping together after the closure of its prayer room.

In January 2004, authorities ordered the Juma Mosque congregation in Baku to vacate its premises. The congregation, which registered with the MOJ in 1993, refused to re-register with the SCWRA amid concerns that the new process might allow the Government to interfere with its practices. After protracted litigation in the district and appellate courts the mosque was turned over to the Icheri Sheher Historical and Architectural National Reserve. In June 2004, MOJ officials and police evicted the Juma Mosque community from its premises.

The Caucasus Muslim Board appointed a new religious leader to replace Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, the mosque's imam. The mosque initially remained open for worship with the new imam leading prayers. In July 2004, authorities closed the building, claiming that it needed renovation. The following day, approximately 30 members of the Juma Mosque community started afternoon prayers on the steps of the mosque. Police used excessive force in arresting five worshippers. In July 2004, police detained 26 members of the Juma Mosque community, including Ibrahimoglu, who had gathered at a private home for funeral rites. They were released several hours later. In August 2004, the Supreme Court upheld the decision to evict the Juma Mosque community from the historic mosque. As of June 30, 2005, the mosque remained closed and the members were worshipping in other venues.

Government officials cited the political activity of Ibrahimoglu as one reason for seeking the eviction of the Juma Mosque community from its current location. Ibrahimoglu and the leadership of the community joined opposition political party leader Isa Gambar's 2003 election movement, and Ibrahimoglu urged the Juma worshippers to vote against the current Government.

In April 2004, following a flawed trial, a court convicted Ibrahimoglu of participating in post-election demonstrations in October 2003, and sentenced him to a 5-year suspended sentence after he had spent four months in pretrial detention. Since his conviction, Ibrahimoglu has not been allowed to travel outside the country, including to several meetings of the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe where he was to be an official NGO participant. The government prevented his travel because the law prohibits citizens convicted of criminal offenses and with suspended sentences from traveling abroad.

On June 30, 2005, the 1-year anniversary of the Juma community's eviction from the mosque, police briefly detained and released Ibrahimoglu for leading a group of

worshippers into the Juma Mosque to conduct prayers, although the mosque remained officially closed. He and approximately 30 members of the Juma Mosque community also participated in demonstrations earlier in the day in front of the SCWRA.

Local law enforcement authorities occasionally monitor religious services, and some observant Christians and Muslims are penalized for their religious affiliations. The Law on Religious Freedom expressly prohibits religious proselytizing by foreigners, and this is enforced strictly. Government authorities have deported several Iranian and other foreign clerics operating independently of the organized Muslim community for alleged violations of the law. The Government is concerned about Islamic missionary groups (predominately Iranian and Wahhabis) that operate in the country, whose activities have been restricted in recent years. On May 8, 2005, the Government closed a Saudi Arabian-sponsored Sunni mosque in the city of Sumgayit.

Some religious groups continued to report some restrictions and delays in the import of religious literature by some government ministries, although the SCWRA has also facilitated the import of such literature. While permitting their import, the SCWRA arbitrarily limited the number of copies of a Jehovah's Witness publication allowed entry. The Baptist Union reports that, during the period covered by this report, the SCWRA also restricted the quantity of religious books allowed to enter after granting import permission.

The Government regulates travel for the purpose of religious training. One needs to obtain permission from or register with the SCWRA or the Ministry of Education in order to go abroad for religious studies.

No religious identification is required in passports or other identity documents. In 1999, a court decided in favor of a group of Muslim women who sued for the right to wear headscarves in passport photos; however, the Center for Protection of Conscience and Religious Persuasion Freedom (DEVAMM) reports that authorities still prohibit Muslim women from wearing headscarves in passport photos. In December 2004, a group of women appealed to the European Court of Human Rights to protest the ban.

Some local officials continued to discourage Muslim women from wearing headscarves in schools. However, in June 2005, a court in Sumgayit upheld a school teacher's right to wear a headscarf while teaching and ordered the school to pay her back wages for the two months she was not allowed to teach.

Following months of repeated refusals, local officials in the Zaqatala region finally issued a birth certificate to Baptist parents who wished to give their son a Christian name. Members of the ethnic Georgian minority reported that difficulty in registering children with non-Azeri names is particularly acute in this region.

On February 4, 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that a member of a religious minority must fulfill compulsory military service despite his Constitutional entitlement to alternative military service because of his religious beliefs. After seven months of litigation in the lower courts, the Supreme Court held that while Azerbaijan remained in a "state of war" with Armenia, the military's service requirement superseded the individual's alternative service right. The Court further agreed with the military's argument that absent implementing regulations, the military was not obligated to provide any alternative service option. The individual and his family subsequently left the country.

Press reports indicate that in the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, a predominantly ethnic Armenian area over which the authorities have no control, the Armenian Apostolic Church enjoys a special status. The largely Muslim ethnic Azeri population in Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven occupied territories, which fled the region during the conflict with Armenia in the 1990s, has not been able to return to these areas.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials continued. In many instances, abuses reflected the popular antipathy towards ethnic Azeri converts to non-Russian Orthodox Christianity and other nontraditional religions.

In mid-March, the head of the CMB appeared in a television expose describing non-traditional religious groups as subversive sects. The chairman of the SCWRA spoke on television in recent months claiming that Adventists used financial bribes to recruit new adherents. The Adventists have denied the accusations.

Non-traditional religious groups face particularly acute problems operating in remote regions of Azerbaijan, including the exclave of Nakhchivan. For example, in December 2004, the leader of the small Baha'i community in Nakhchivan was briefly detained and released, reportedly because of his religious activity and teachings.

Government authorities took various actions to restrict what they claimed were political and terrorist activities by Iranian and other clerics operating independently of the organized Muslim community. The Government has outlawed several Islamic humanitarian organizations because of credible reports about connections to terrorist activities. The Government also deported foreign Muslim clerics it suspected of engaging in political activities. There also were reports that the Government harassed Muslim groups due to security concerns. For example, the Human Rights Resource Center in Khachmaz reported that Wahhabis in Khachmaz were harassed because the authorities suspected that all Wahhabists have links to terrorism.

Members of the Juma Mosque community alleged that they were kicked as police entered during morning prayers in June 2004. In addition, the CMB appointed a new akhund (or imam) to replace Ibrahimoglu. Some worshippers reacted with anger to news of the appointment. The mosque originally remained open for worship with the new imam leading prayers. In July 2004, authorities closed the building for renovation. The following day approximately 30 members of the Juma Mosque community started afternoon prayers on the steps of the mosque. Police used excessive force in arresting five worshippers who were released several hours later. The mosque remained closed for renovation.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that authorities occasionally fined or detained and beat individuals for meeting in private homes.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees. In the northern city of Khachmaz, community members reported that on several occasions police harassed and detained some Muslims who had disrupted public order. The police allegedly shaved the detainee's beards; however, police officials denied detaining anyone for religious reasons.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

Some religious groups in the country report improvements in their ability to function freely. Several churches have indicated that they either received or expect to receive their registration, they were able to import religious literature, and they met without government interference.

When minority religious communities outside of Baku reported that local authorities illegally denied their registration, the SCWRA intervened on their behalf and rectified the situation. In previous years, the SCWRA had taken a particularly strict approach to the registration of minority religious communities and had failed to prevent local authorities from banning such communities.

During the reporting period, the Government worked actively to promote interfaith understanding. SCWRA convened leaders of various religious communities on several occasions to resolve disputes in private and has provided forums for visiting officials to discuss religious issues with religious figures. In the past year the SCWRA has organized ten seminars, one conference, and seven regional meetings on religious freedom and tolerance.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is popular prejudice against Muslims who convert to non-Islamic faiths and hostility towards groups that proselytize, particularly evangelical Christian and missionary groups. This has been accentuated by the unresolved conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.

During the period covered by this report, newspapers and television broadcasts depicted small, vulnerable religious groups as a threat to the identity of the nation and undermining the country's traditions of interfaith harmony, which led to local harassment. In addition, the head of the SCWRA has made remarks at times during these broadcasts, which contributed to the climate of hostility these broadcasts generate.

During the reporting period, articles critical of Wahhabism and Christian missionaries appeared in many newspapers and one television channel aired "exposes" of Christian church services. Religious proselytizing by foreigners is against the law, and there is vocal opposition to it.

Hostility also exists toward foreign (mostly Iranian and Wahhabist) Muslim missionary activity, which partly is viewed as seeking to spread political Islam and therefore as a threat to stability and peace. The media targeted some Muslim communities that the Government claimed were involved in illegal activities.

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

There were few cases of prejudice and discrimination against Jews in the country, and in the few instances of anti-Semitic activity, the Government was quick to respond. Jewish community leaders consistently remarked on the positive relationship they have with the Government and leaders of other religious communities. In July 2004, a new Jewish community center was opened in Baku with high-level government participation. Authorities also reserved one wing of a Baku school for secular and religious classes for 200 Jewish students.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, Embassy Officers conveyed U.S. concerns about the registration process and the overall attitude towards non-traditional religious groups to the Chairman of the SCWRA, and expressed concerns about the Government's commitment to religious freedom with others in the Government and publicly in the press. The Embassy also repeatedly expressed objections to the censorship of religious literature. The Embassy also closely monitored the court case against the Juma Mosque Community and met with government and religious leaders to urge them to respect religious freedom. In October 2004, a staff member of the Office of International Religious Freedom visited Baku and advocated respect for religious freedom in meetings with an official from the CMB and senior Government officials in the President's executive office and the SCWRA.

The Ambassador and Embassy officers maintain close contacts with leading Muslim, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish religious officials, and regularly meet with members of non-official religious groups in order to monitor religious freedom. The Ambassador and Embassy officers also maintain close contact with NGOs that address issues of religious freedom.

In November 2004, the Ambassador hosted two Iftars during Ramadan for leaders of the country's major religious communities.

BELARUS

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

Respect for religious freedom continued to decline and be uneven during the period covered by this report, though some improvements occurred. The Government continued to restrict religious freedom in accordance with the provisions of a 2002 law on religion and a 2003 Concordat with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC). Although there is no state religion, the Concordat grants the BOC privileged status. Authorities continued to harass certain religions and denominations, particularly those that the authorities appeared to regard as bearers of foreign cultural influence, or having a political agenda. Protestants in particular attracted negative attention for their perceived links with the United States. A 2002 law on religion required religious groups to re-register. The authorities refused to re-register some minority religious groups, including some Protestant groups, Orthodox confessions outside of the BOC, and some Eastern religions. Without registration many of these groups faced problems with authorities and found it difficult to function.

Nevertheless, the situation improved during the period covered by this report for a few minority religious groups, including the Roman Catholics and the Seventh-day Adventists, and the vast majority of religious groups successfully completed the registration requirements of the 2002 law.

The generally amicable relationship among religions and a widely held ethic of tolerance in society contributed to religious freedom; however, hostile or intolerant attitudes by some government officials and in some parts of the press encouraged negative attitudes toward some minority faiths and toward Jews.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 80,154 square miles and its population is approximately 9,990,000.

The country historically has been an area of interaction, as well as competition and conflict, between Belarusian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. According to polls, approximately 50 percent of Belarusians consider themselves religious. The Government indicates that of all persons who profess a religious faith approximately 80 percent belong to the BOC, 14 percent are either practicing Roman Catholics or identify themselves with the Roman Catholic Church, and 2 percent are Protestant. Between 50,000 and 70,000 persons identify themselves as Jewish. There are also adherents to the Greek Catholic Church, Orthodox religions outside the BOC, and some Eastern religions. Minority religious groups include, but are not limited to: Hare Krishnas, Hindus, Baha'i, Seventh-day Adventists, Old Believers, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Apostolic Christians, Calvinists, and Lutherans. According to the Committee of Religious and Nationality Affairs (CRNA), as of May 2005, Belarus had 2,829 registered religious communities. This includes the Presbyterian Church, which authorities registered for the first time in 2004. It also includes 1,290 Belarusian Orthodox, 450 Roman Catholic, 70 Seventh-day Adventist, 25 Jewish, 30 Muslim, and 30 Old Believers. Exact numbers for registered evangelical Christian, Baptist and Greek Catholic communities were not available.

The country was designated an Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1989, creating the BOC under Patriarchal Exarch Metropolitan Filaret. The number of parishes throughout the country was approximately 1,290 by the end of the period covered by this report. Other Orthodox confessions also exist in the country, but suffer from strong discrimination. Unable to register without the consent of the BOC, they are effectively banned. These include the Belarusian Autonomous Orthodox Church (BAOC), the Catacomb Orthodox Church, the True Orthodox Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

There were approximately 400 Roman Catholic parishes in the country. The head of the Roman Catholic Church generally does not involve the Church in political issues. The cardinal has prohibited the display of all national and political symbols in churches. During the period covered by this report, the Catholic Church's situation in Belarus improved. On February 8 2005, President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Cardinal Swiatek met and committed to improving the relationship between the Government and the Roman Catholic Church.

Approximately 120,000 citizens were considered to have Jewish nationality near the end of the Soviet period in 1989, compared to between 50,000 and 70,000 at the end of the period covered by this report. At least half of the present Jewish population is thought to live in or near Minsk. The majority of the country's Jewish population, 98 percent, is not actively religious. Of those who are, most are believed to be either Reform or Conservative. There is also a small but active Lubavitch community and a Chabad community. In 2002, a Jewish community center in Minsk opened with assistance from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Adherents of Protestant faiths, while still small, continued to grow in number. Since 1990, the number of Protestant congregations, registered and unregistered, has more than doubled. The two largest Protestant groups are registered under separate Pentecostal and Baptist unions.

There are a number of congregations of the Greek Catholic Church, which once had a membership of approximately three quarters of the country's population but suffered from severe persecution under Tsarist and Soviet rule. Following the 1991 reestablishment of Belarusian independence, the attempt to revive the Church, which maintains Orthodox rituals but is in communion with the Vatican, has had only limited success due to determined opposition by the BOC.

In 2002, a Muslim organization, the Spiritual Office of Muslims, split from the Belarusian Muslim Religious Association, the main organizational body of the 30,000 Muslims in the country. The Spiritual Office of Muslims currently claims about 300 members. Some members of a community of approximately 10,000 ethnic Tatars, with roots dating back to the 11th century, practice Sunni Islam.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in practice. Although the 1996 amended Constitution reaffirms the equality of religions and denominations before the law, it also contains restrictive language that stipulates that cooperation between the State and religious organizations “is regulated with regard for their influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and state traditions of the Belarusian people.” The CRNA regulates all religious matters in the country.

In 2002, President Lukashenko signed a religion law into effect, despite protests from human rights organizations, the European Union, and domestic religious groups. The law recognizes the “determining role of the Orthodox Church in the historical formation and development of spiritual, cultural, and state traditions of the Belarusian people” as well as the historical importance of Roman Catholicism, Orthodox Judaism, Sunni Islam, and Evangelical Lutheranism, groups commonly referred to as “traditional faiths” in society. However, key omissions indicate present interests rather than historical reality influenced the list. The “traditional faiths” do not include religious communities with deep historical roots in the country such as the Greek Catholic Church, established in 1546; Calvinist churches, active in the country by the mid 17th century; or Priestless Old Believer communities, which began the country at the end of the 17th century.

Despite the law’s stated intention to guarantee religious freedom, it contains a number of very restrictive elements that increase the Government’s control of the activities of religious groups. The 2002 law requires all religious groups to receive prior governmental approval to import and distribute literature and prevents foreigners from leading religious organizations, and it denies religious communities the right to establish religious schools to train their own clergy. In addition, the law confines the activity of religious communities to the areas where they register. Further, the law establishes complex registration requirements that some religious communities, both traditional and nontraditional, have difficulty fulfilling. The 2002 law also requires all previously registered groups to re-register by November 17, 2004, and banned immediately at the passing of the law all religious activity by unregistered religious groups.

Domestic religious groups continued to appeal for revocation of at least part of the 2002 law. In September 2004, Protestant groups sent petitions to President Lukashenko, the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, and the Constitutional Court calling for revision of the most restrictive elements of the religion law. They declared that the law was inconsistent with the Constitution and international standards. They specifically mentioned parts restricting activity to the area where a group was registered, the difficulty of obtaining permission to worship in a public place, and the preamble identifying the BOC as having a defining role and influence in the country. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the President had yet to respond to these and all previous appeals by religious groups to revise the law. However, an official in Parliament wrote a reply to justify maintaining the status quo and leaving the law as it presently stands.

The 2002 law established three tiers of religious groups: religious communities, religious associations, and Republican religious associations. Religious communities, or local individual religious organizations, must comprise 20 persons over the age of 18 who live in neighboring areas. Religious associations comprise 10 communities, one of which must have been active in the country for at least 20 years, and can be formed only by a Republican (national level) religious association. Republican religious associations are formed only when there are active religious communities in the majority of the country’s six regions. All applications to establish associations and Republican associations must be submitted to the CRNA.

Previously registered religious communities were able to re-register with the former minimum requirement of 10 members, instead of the 20 now needed for registering a new community. To register, a community must submit a list of founders with their full names, places of residence, citizenships, and signatures, copies of their founding statutes, minutes of their founding meeting, and permission confirming the community’s right to any property indicated in their founding statutes. For those communities practicing religions not previously known to the Government, information on their faith must also be submitted. The Regional Executive Committees (for those groups outside of Minsk) or the Minsk City Executive Committee handles all application requests for religious communities.

While the law denies communities the right to establish institutions to train religious clergy, it permits them to operate Sunday schools. Furthermore, authorities

generally accommodate members of religions with special requirements with respect to various holy days.

In addition to re-registering religious associations that were older than 20 years, the CRNA also allowed re-registration of some religious associations that existed before the 2002 law but could not meet the 20-year rule. To register, associations must provide a list of members of the managing body with biographical information, proof of permission for the association to be at its designated location, and minutes from the founding congress of the association. By law, associations have the exclusive right to establish religious educational institutions, invite foreigners to work with respective religious groups, and organize cloister and monastic communities.

The CRNA reported in December 2004 that of the 2,780 religious communities subject to the re-registration requirement, 2,676 successfully re-registered. Of the 140 religious associations and Republican religious associations required to re-register, 128 were re-registered. The CRNA attests that the 12 religious associations not re-registered self-liquidated for lack of members and activity. Of the 104 religious communities not re-registered, 84 self-liquidated. Representatives of several religious groups reported that the CRNA offered significant assistance throughout the process. The remaining 20 “did not manage to go through re-registration due to irregularities of critical importance,” according to the CRNA. The 20 denied re-registration all represent religions the Government considers non-traditional. For example, some Full Gospel churches and the Hare Krishnas were denied re-registration.

The 2003 Concordat between the BOC and the Government guarantees the BOC autonomy in its internal affairs and the freedom to perform all religious rites and other activities, as well as the right to consider itself in a special relationship with the State. The Concordat recognizes the BOC’s “influence on the formulation of spiritual, cultural, and national traditions of the Belarusian people.” The Concordat calls for the Government and the BOC to cooperate in implementing policy in various fields, including education, development and protection of cultural legacies, and security. Although it states that the agreement will not limit the religious freedoms of other faiths, the Concordat calls for the Government and the BOC to combat unnamed “pseudo-religious structures that present a danger to individuals and society.” Despite a series of cooperation agreements signed over the past few years between the BOC and various Government ministries, BOC involvement in state institutions is reportedly fairly low.

Nevertheless, in October 2004, President Lukashenko emphasized the continued importance of the BOC: “I very much want the Orthodox Church to stay within the framework of our state. I want the Orthodox Church to be an institution of our state and one of its main supporters.” Lukashenko went on to encourage the protection of the status quo against “foreign” religions: “Some members of the opposition, instigated by foreign minions, make provocative suggestions about narrowing the sphere of activities of traditional religions, primarily the Orthodox Church, for the benefit of various sects and religions that are nontraditional in this country.”

In March 2004, the National Intellectual Property Center granted the BOC the exclusive right to use the word “Orthodox” in its title and to use the image of the Cross of Euphrosynia, the patroness saint of Belarus, as its symbol. These moves are seen as further instruments to solidify the standing of the BOC as the only permitted Orthodox faith in the country.

The Government refers to groups that it does not consider to be traditional faiths as “nontraditional,” and government officials and state media also widely use the term “sect” when referring to nontraditional religious groups, although it is not an official designation.

Under regulations issued in 2001, the Government requires an inviting organization to make a written request to invite foreign clergy, including the dates and reason for the visit. Even if the visit is for nonreligious purposes such as charitable activities, representatives must obtain a visa and permission from the CRNA. The CRNA has 20 days in which to respond, and there is no provision for appeal of the CRNA’s decision. Legislation restricts “subversive activities” by foreign organizations in the country and prohibits the establishment of offices of foreign organizations whose activities incite “national, religious, and racial enmity” or could “have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the people.”

Some restrictions on freedom of religion arise from other Belarusian laws that circumscribe basic freedoms. As the CRNA stated in its response to the U.S. State Department’s 2004 International Religious Freedom Report, “Sanctions against representatives of religious associations are applied for breaching the law and are not aimed at limiting religious freedom.” The most common charge against religious leaders is organizing or hosting an unauthorized meeting, a charge that arises from a law constraining freedom of assembly, not any law on religion.

According to the Government, the law permits residential property to be used for religious services only after it has been converted from residential use. The Housing Code permits the use of such property for nonresidential purposes with the permission of local executive and administrative bodies.

Government employees are not required to take any kind of religious oath or practice elements of a particular faith.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Religious freedom was restricted both actively and passively by the Government. The Government actively passed laws that limit freedom to worship, freedom to speak, and freedom to assemble. The Government also failed to condemn acts of religious insensitivity or intolerance. Some of the 2,829 registered religious communities were registered only on a local basis, which provided limited rights. With or without official registration, some faiths had encountered difficulty renting or purchasing property to establish places of worship, building churches (e.g., the Greek Catholics and Protestant groups), or openly training clergy.

Contrary to the expectations of many observers, the CRNA reported that Regional Executive Committees and the Minsk Executive Committee re-registered 99.3 percent of those religious communities that did not self-liquidate and the expectations that the Government would use re-registration for massive religious repression were not met. Even so, re-registration alone did not guarantee religious freedom, and the CRNA continued to deny re-registration to certain groups. The reasons for denial were based on provisions of the law, but the apparently arbitrary application of the law resulted in the restriction of religious freedom.

On August 18, 2004, the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union (UCSJ) was denied re-registration for submitting some documents late. The UCSJ is one of the primary Jewish human rights organizations in the country. It was previously registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a branch of a foreign organization. UCSJ appealed the denial to the Supreme Court, but for technical reasons the Court declined to take the case. This left the UCSJ with no option but to close. However, Government actions prevented UCSJ from being able to officially close. Following the re-registration denial, the authorities blocked UCSJ's bank account, preventing the organization from paying its lease, taxes, or providing severance pay to its employees. In mid-June 2005, the UCSJ was able to access its bank accounts and pay its rent and the salaries of its employees; however, the UCSJ remained unregistered by the end of the period covered by this report.

According to the Forum 18 News Service, in 2003, Vladimir Lameko, Vice Chairman of the CRNA, ordered local officials to increase monitoring of the activity of religious organizations, carry out regular visits during worship services and meetings with religious leaders, and conduct regular checks on unregistered religious groups to terminate their activities. Lameko cited "crude violations" of the law in Nesvizh "predominately by Protestant communities" and the need to improve local officials' ability to "regulate the ethnic-confessional situation." In addition, Lameko ordered local officials to prevent the main Polish minority organization in the country from using property owned by the Roman Catholic Church, and to conduct "systematic work" with local Catholic leaders to ensure that foreign Catholic religious workers use Belarusian or Russian in their sermons. Following Lameko's order, representatives from the Union Evangelical Faith Christians and Baptist communities reported that teachers questioned children who belong to these churches about their attendance at religious ceremonies to determine which students were attending Protestant ceremonies. During the period covered by this report, this questioning allegedly continued, although to a lesser degree.

Due to the provisions of the 2002 Law on Religion, groups that do not qualify as Republican associations, such as the Greek Catholic Church, cannot establish media publications, found a monastery, or invite foreign citizens to the country in order to engage in religious activity.

Citizens theoretically are not prohibited from proselytizing and may speak freely about their religious beliefs; however, authorities often intervene to interfere with, stop, or punish individuals who proselytize on behalf of some registered and unregistered religions. Authorities regulate every aspect of proselytizing and literature distribution: who may participate, what may be done, when groups may participate, and where groups may be active. The Government continued to enforce a 1995 Council of Ministers decree that regulates the activities of religious workers, as well as a 1997 Council of Ministers directive that permits the teaching of religion at youth camps for registered religious groups.

Authorities continued to harass, fine, and detain Hare Krishnas for illegally distributing religious literature. Throughout the period covered by this report, Minsk city authorities repeatedly denied requests by Hare Krishnas for permission to dis-

tribute religious materials in the city, thereby rendering all Hare Krishna literature distribution illegal.

Foreign missionaries are not permitted to engage in religious activities outside of the institutions that invited them. The law requires one-year, multiple-entry "spiritual activities" visas for foreign missionaries. Religious groups and individuals continue to experience difficulties in obtaining visas, even those that have a long history in the country. Even missionaries operating legitimately and openly with a missionary visa often experience harassment from authorities, particularly if they hail from the West.

Although there were no reports of visa denials or revocations to Western missionaries, authorities reportedly made some wait until the last minute for their visa renewals or forced them to incur the additional expense of going to Lithuania for short-term visas, while waiting for their missionary visa renewal. At least one Protestant missionary and the locals who worked with him were repeatedly summoned and questioned about the sources and use of his funding, despite the fact that he had been in the country for more than 5 years and had not been charged with visa violations or legal problems.

Since its revival in 1991, the Roman Catholic Church has experienced a severe shortage of qualified native clergy. The Church continued to have difficulty obtaining permission from authorities, particularly in the Grodno region, to bring in a sufficient number of foreign religious workers, primarily from Poland, to make up for the shortage.

Having a lease agreement is an indispensable condition to secure a legal address and subsequently apply for registration as a religious group or church.

Approval for visits by foreign clergy or religious workers often involves a lengthy bureaucratic process. Internal affairs agencies may expel foreign clergymen from the country by not extending their registration or by denying them temporary stay permits. These authorities may make decisions on expulsion on their own or based on recommendations from Religious Affairs Councils, regional executive committees, or the Religious Affairs Department of the Executive Committee of the city of Minsk.

As a result of the regulations governing the use of residential property for religious services, several Protestant churches and other nontraditional faiths have become caught in a closed loop. They are denied permission to convert their properties for religious uses because they are not registered religious groups, but without a legal address are unable to register. Religious groups that cannot register often are forced to meet illegally or in the homes of individual members.

According to Forum 18, in June 2005, authorities warned Russian Orthodox Church Abroad priest Fr Leonid Plyats that he would receive jail time or a massive fine if he conducted "illegal religious activity." Since the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad is not registered, any activity other than a small gathering in a home can be construed as "illegal religious activity."

While Protestants and Greek Catholics reported that they had been able to rent space in meeting halls for religious services more successfully than in previous years, local nontraditional religious groups continued to be denied space in meeting halls to conduct prayer services. In response to Protestant requests for permission to rent property, the CRNA claimed that only local authorities decide whether or not to grant such permission.

During the period covered by this report, many traditional and nontraditional religious groups continued to experience problems obtaining property or registering at property they already own, due to apparent government efforts to restrict the ability of these groups to establish houses of worship. In 2003, city authorities in Slonim pressured the director of a local meeting hall to cancel a rental contract he had made with the New Generation Full Gospel Church. At the end of the reporting period, the church remained unable to find a place to meet legally.

In 2003, local authorities rescinded an earlier decision to allocate property to a Pentecostal community in the town of Druzhnii, claiming that the group should first ascertain the public opinion of the town. Oblast authorities overruled the decision and local authorities then offered the community three plots of land from which to choose.

As of June 2005, the CRNA had yet to approve the request by the registered Full Gospel community in Borovlyani to renovate a home for use as a church. In 2002, Borovlyani local authorities refused to permit a registered Full Gospel community to renovate a privately built home into a church. Though the community had received all necessary permission from local authorities, the religious affairs office rejected the application. The CRNA office cited a letter it received from several Orthodox townspeople that accused members of the Full Gospel community of illegally entering homes to proselytize, stealing Orthodox crosses from those wearing them, and belonging to an unregistered "sect."

New Life Church in Minsk, a member of the Union of Full Gospel Churches, might be forcefully closed because authorities refuse to register the congregation at the cow barn it owns and wishes to use as a place of worship. New Life Church, known as the “cowshed church,” bought the barn and its surrounding property three years ago. The church began to meet there after denied permission to rent anywhere else. Local authorities, however, refuse to allow New Life to convert the building, change how the cowshed is registered, or allow the church to meet in the building as is. Therefore, New Life Church has no place to worship and no place to register, making all church activities illegal. New Life’s pastor and other leaders have received large fines for holding illegal services, technically for violating laws on assembly. At the same time, authorities permit a BOC community to meet without disturbance in a converted railcar less than a mile away.

The 1,000-member Minsk Community of Krishna Consciousness (the Hare Krishnas) is also facing closure for meeting and attempting to register at property it already owns. Local authorities refuse to register the Krishnas at a building it purchased in 1990 and has used as a place of worship since that time, claiming the building is only zoned for residential use and not for religious assembly. The Minsk City Executive Committee issued two warnings to the community, first in October 2004 and then in February 2005, for meeting at a building where it is not registered. The appeal by the Minsk Community of Krishna Consciousness to the UN Commission on Human Rights continued throughout the period covered by this report, hindering the Government’s ability to close the community, because the appeal process was underway.

There were no reports of religious groups being evicted from property during the period covered by this report; however, authorities continued to break up unsanctioned religious gatherings in apartments.

A government decree specifies measures to ensure public order and safety during general public gatherings. Some meeting hall officials have cited the decree as a basis for canceling or refusing to extend agreements with religious groups for the use of their facilities. During the period covered by this report, it was practically impossible for a religious group to rent and meet in a public facility.

According to the Forum 18 News Service, in March 2004, Minsk city authorities rejected a request by the Calvinist Reformed Church to conduct an international conference devoted to the 450th anniversary of the Church’s founding in the country. The Church was reportedly informed by Minsk city authorities that the Church had no right to conduct an international conference since the organization was not registered as a republican religious association, despite the fact that the religion law enables religious organizations to invite foreigners to participate in meetings, pilgrimages, and other activities.

Despite having tax-exempt status, some Protestant groups reported that tax authorities repeatedly fined them for their failure to pay taxes on assistance provided to destitute families and individuals.

While there were no reported publications of anti-Protestant articles in state-owned periodicals, state-owned periodicals continued to attack other nontraditional faiths. An article in an April 2004 issue of *Znamya Novosti* printed an article labeling the Unification Church, the “Church of Christ,” and the Church of Scientology among the most dangerous of “sects” in the country.

A March 2004 article in the state-owned newspaper *Minski Kurier* printed information critical of adherents to the Unification Church and Hare Krishnas. The article claimed that in 1997, Hare Krishnas were designated as a “destructive totalitarian sect.” According to a representative of the Hare Krishna community, the authorities never made such a designation. After being confronted by the Hare Krishnas, the journalist of the article admitted that this false information was provided by the State Committee for Security (BKGB), something later confirmed by the BKGB.

The Ministry of Education continued to use the textbook “Man, Society, and State,” which labels Protestants and Hare Krishnas as “sects,” even after the protests of religious groups. After conducting an examination of the book, the CRNA and the Ministry of Education determined that the use of the word “sect” was a “scientific” word, and did not label Hare Krishnas or Protestants as antisocial. The Ministry of Education has committed to revising paragraphs using this language in future editions of the textbook.

Leaders of Protestant communities also protested the language in the textbook “Basics on Home and Personal Security” as deliberately discriminatory against Protestants, particularly the chapter titled “Beware of the Sects.” The chapter includes a paragraph informing students of such “sects” as Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Maria, White Brotherhood, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. In January 2005, Protestant leaders sent a letter of protest to the President, National Assembly

leaders, the CRNA, and the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education promised to review the matter. The CRNA already reviewed the request and declared the section did not infringe upon the rights of Protestants.

While there were no reported publications of anti-Protestant literature or articles in the state press during the period covered by this report, the sale and distribution of anti-Semitic literature through state press distributors, government agencies, and at stores affiliated with the BOC continued. As in previous years, anti-Semitic literature continued to be sold at the National Academy of Sciences.

In past years, anti-Semitic literature was openly sold during several Orthodox book fairs in Minsk, and at the House of Mercy, a BOC-established hospice in Minsk. The Roman Catholic Church reported that anti-Catholic literature is also sold at places linked to the BOC. Anti-Semitic and Russian ultranationalist newspapers and literature continued to be sold at Pravoslavnaya Kniga (Orthodox Bookstore), a store that sells Orthodox literature and religious paraphernalia. Pravoslavnaya Kniga is part of the company Pravoslavnaya Initsiativa, whose general director often writes xenophobic articles. Although the BOC has stated that it has no ties to Pravoslavnaya Kniga, employees of the store maintained that Pravoslavnaya Kniga is the official bookstore of the BOC. The BOC denial of ties seems more unlikely considering that the BOC received exclusive rights to the word "Pravoslavnaya" in 2004.

Despite a 2003 order by the Prosecutor General and the Ministry of Information to remove the anti-Semitic and xenophobic newspaper *Russkiy Vestnik*, distribution of the newspaper continued. Pravoslavnaya Kniga employees informed Embassy staff that they are only selling off their stock and not new copies. The staff also found the book "The Enemies of Russia and the Slavic World Who are against Belarus and President Lukashenko." This ultranationalist xenophobic book includes a chapter by Vladimir Chertovich, General Director of Pravoslavnaya Initsiativa, a Minsk-based publishing company known for publishing hate literature directed at Jews, Muslims, and other minorities. It was published in Russia but is distributed in the country at a bookstore affiliated with the BOC.

In response to an appeal by a Jewish group to punish Pravoslavnaya Kniga, in 2004 the Procurator General launched an investigation into the incident to determine whether or not Pravoslavnaya Kniga had illegally distributed literature that promoted intolerance. The General Prosecutor's office then transferred the case to the Minsk city prosecutor's office. In October 2004, the Minsk city prosecutor's office declared there was no basis for a criminal case.

Despite the assurances of various government officials that the sale of such literature was illegal, the government took no visible steps to stop the sale of xenophobic literature at Pravoslavnaya Kniga or other locations. The CRNA asserts the publication of such literature in the country was illegal but that nothing could be done regarding literature published in Russia.

In April 2004, BOC clergy reportedly made several anti-Catholic statements during a nationally televised religious ceremony marking Orthodox Easter. The Roman Catholic Church has also expressed concern about the sale of anti-Catholic literature at events and stores linked with the BOC.

Restitution of religious property did not occur during the period covered by this report. There was no legal basis for restitution of property that was seized during the Soviet and Nazi occupations, and the law restricts the restitution of property that is being used for cultural or educational purposes. Furthermore, the Government does not return buildings if it had nowhere to move the current occupants. Many former synagogues in Minsk were used as theaters, museums, sports complexes, and even a beer hall; most of the Jewish community's requests to have these synagogues returned were refused. During the period covered by this report, Jewish communities did not request the return of buildings or other real estate. Some Jewish leaders acknowledged that because of the Holocaust and mass emigration, the Jewish population was so small it cannot use all its former property. However, Jewish communities were seeking the return of Jewish cultural artifacts, books, and particularly Torahs from museums. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not yet officially responded, though some officials privately expressed to Jewish leaders that they shared their concern and support the initiative.

A Catholic community in Minsk requested the return of a centuries-old church and monastery in central Minsk. The building currently houses the Belarusian State Archives. The Government expressed its willingness to return the church, but only after a suitable new place and the funds for moving the archives were found; neither was expected in the near future.

Return of property to religious communities in past years occurred on an irregular basis. Over the past several years, religious groups have lobbied the authorities successfully to return several properties in Minsk and other cities. According to the

CRNA, religious organizations had the advantageous right to have religious property returned to them, except in cases when they were being used for cultural or sporting purposes. Official statistics indicate that from 1988 to 2003, the government returned more than 1,120 buildings that belonged to various religious groups, including 709 to the BOC, 292 to the Roman Catholic community, 29 to the Old-Rite Believers, 12 to the Jewish community, 7 to the Protestant community, 3 to the Muslim community, and 1 to the Greek Catholic community. However, there were no reports that the Government returned any former religious property to their previous owners during the past two years.

Despite a 2003 statement by President Lukashenko that the Government should not inhibit activities of the Jewish community, government officials continued to take actions that indicated a lack of sensitivity toward the Jewish community. Excavation and reconstruction work finished at the site of a 1950s sports stadium in Grodno built on the site of a former Jewish cemetery. During the course of excavation, workers at the site found human remains, which authorities promised to remove from the site for future reburial. Instead, photographs taken by the Jewish community revealed human remains mixed with earth in dump trucks and also being used to resurface a road. An April 2004 visit by Embassy staff found skulls and other bones scattered around the area.

After intense international pressure, Grodno Regional Governor Vladimir Savchenko signed an agreement with a national Jewish leader in 2003 for an immediate cessation of excavation activity but with continued construction work at the site. In 2003, Savchenko signed a second agreement with another national Jewish leader that called for the removal of remains that were mixed in with earth used to resurface a nearby road and, again, the immediate cessation of excavation activity at the cemetery. During the period covered by this report, the local Jewish community reached an agreement with local authorities to have the uncovered remains reburied in a different Jewish cemetery and declared itself satisfied with the government's efforts. They would like to put up a plaque noting that the stadium sits on a former Jewish cemetery, but although they received permission from authorities, they lack the funds to do so. Local Jewish leaders feel the situation reflected insensitivity more than anti-Semitism. The authorities were known to have dug up portions of a veteran's cemetery and an Orthodox cemetery during other construction projects in the recent past.

In February 2004, by order of the Ministry of Education, Belarusian State University (BSU) closed the International Humanities Institute, which was an independent educational entity affiliated with BSU that was the only higher educational entity offering Judaica studies. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Judaica program continued to exist as part of BSU's curriculum but no longer as an autonomous institute.

In contrast to previous reporting periods, government officials did not make public anti-Semitic statements. In a 2003 Associated Press article, Sergei Kostyan, Deputy Chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the lower house of parliament, rejected criticism of the installation of a gas pipeline near the site of a former Jewish cemetery in Mozyr, accusing Jewish persons of sowing "ethnic discord." During a 2003 press conference, Information Minister Vladimir Rusakevich was quoted saying that the country needs to live with Russia like brothers but to bargain with Russia "like a Yid."

The CRNA reported that it regularly responded to all public expressions of xenophobia by notifying the relevant government agencies responsible for pursuing legal action against the perpetrators; however, no prosecutions or convictions were observed during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government frequently abused religious freedom of several religious groups.

Protestant, non-BOC Orthodox, and Eastern religious communities were fined for illegally conducting and hosting religious services and carrying out unsanctioned religious activities. According to the CRNA, convictions for such offenses were based on charges of either disturbing public order or illegally gathering without prior permission. The law allows people to gather to pray in private homes; however, it imposes restrictions on holding rituals, rites, or ceremonies in such locations and requires prior permission from local authorities.

In October 2004, the courts fined the pastor of the registered Light to the World Full Gospel Church \$174 (345,000 Belarusian rubles, about a month's salary) for allegedly holding an unauthorized religious meeting in his home.

On December 28, 2004, for its meetings in the cowshed, the court fined New Life Church administrator Vasilii Yurevich \$1,500 (3,200,000 Belarusian rubles) for al-

legedly organizing an unauthorized meeting. Based on this conviction, the Minsk City Executive Committee issued New Life Church a warning of potential closure on December 30, 2004. On March 22, 2005, the court fined church pastor Vyacheslav Goncharenko \$334 (714,000 Belarusian rubles), also for allegedly hosting an unsanctioned gathering. This led to the Minsk Executive Committee's second warning to the church on April 1, 2005. The law requires only two warnings before a church can be closed.

In February 2004, a pastor with the International Union of Baptist Churches (IUBC) was warned for conducting religious services in the town of Soligorsk. The same group was warned to cease all illegal religious activity by March 1, 2004. In April 2004, a court in Mozyr fined three members of the IUBC \$176 (380,000 Belarusian rubles) each after they had congratulated patients at a local hospital during Easter. The IUBC is not registered in Belarus, thereby rendering all of its activities illegal.

In 2003, Yuri Denischik, a missionary of the Novogrudok Association of Baptists, was fined approximately \$15 (33,000 Belarusian rubles) for illegally leading a prayer service in a private home registered to the Association.

The Government continued to harass the BAOC, who have given up attempting to register. On November 2, 2004, the Minsk regional prosecutor instituted a criminal case against the BAOC for continuing its effort to reconstruct a former Orthodox church in the town of Semkov Gorodok. Authorities claim they will rebuild the church and restore it to its rightful owners, the BOC. The BOC reportedly plans to relocate the BOC community that presently meets in a converted railcar. In addition, on August 26, 2004, the court fined BAOC head Leonid Akalovich \$9 (19,000 Belarusian rubles) for unauthorized construction. On November 25, 2004, the court also fined him \$11 (24,000 Belarusian rubles) for leading an unregistered religious organization.

Authorities continued to harass, fine, and detain Hare Krishnas, reportedly briefly, for illegally distributing religious literature.

Following direct government pressure and harassment of their respective religious organizations, BAOC priest Yan Spasyuk and the Light of Kaylasa leaders Sergei Akadanav and Tatyana Akadanava left the country in 2003. In addition to the Akadanavs, several other members of the group left following continued government pressure. As a result of the departure of the group's members, and of continued fear of government harassment, the Light of Kaylasa remained inactive during the period of this report. Previously, members of this group had been fined, harassed, and fired from their jobs for their affiliations with the group.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Roman Catholic Church's situation in Belarus improved. On February 8, 2005 President Lukashenko and Cardinal Swiatek met and committed themselves to improving the relationship between the Government and the Roman Catholic Church. For example, President Lukashenko offered state assistance for fresco restoration in a cathedral in central Minsk. The Cardinal, for his part, thanked the Belarusian state for allowing the Catholic Church to both exist and to operate freely.

In 2003 and again in 2004, authorities lowered land taxes for all religious organizations. Religious associations with buildings designated as sites of historical and/or architectural significance pay no land tax. In February 2004, the reconstruction of a mosque razed during Soviet times commenced in downtown Minsk and was ongoing during the reporting period. The Minsk City Executive Committee granted the Muslim Religious Union the land for "permanent use." They did not have to purchase the land nor do they pay rent. The Muslim community must only pay the monthly land tax. The Roman Catholic Church is building a cathedral in Minsk with the same benefits.

In 2004, the government and BOC worked together to accommodate Orthodox citizens who reportedly objected, on religious grounds, to the numbering system of new passports.

During the period covered by this report, the Seventh-day Adventist Church experienced a number of improvements in its situation. In February 2005, the Adventist Theological Institute in Minsk officially received its certificate of certification. In April 2005, the Church released its first edition of a church magazine, considered a breakthrough for a Protestant denomination in the country.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions and a widespread ethic of tolerance in society contributed to religious freedom; however, anti-Semitism and negative attitudes toward minority faiths persisted. In April 2005, NOVAK, an independent polling organization, conducted a poll including the question, "How much do you trust the state and social institutions and organizations?" According to the poll, the BOC is the most trusted institution in the country with 77.5 percent of respondents expressing trust. (The Army ranked second at 71.3 percent, the National Bank third at 60.1 percent and President Lukashenko fourth at 53.8 percent.) 45.2 percent of respondents trust the Catholic Church and only 15.4 percent trust Protestant churches. It is important to note, however, that lack of trust is not necessarily matched by high distrust. While 36 percent of respondents distrust Protestant churches, 48.6 said they simply did not know. Only 19.9 percent distrusted the Catholic Church, while 34.9 percent responded with "do not know."

Jewish organizations continued to criticize the Government for failing to censure anti-Semitic statements by government officials, stop the sale of anti-Semitic literature, and protect cemeteries and Holocaust memorials. In 2003, two deputies in the lower house of Parliament visited a firebombed synagogue in Minsk and condemned the attack. The Government also failed to censure attacks on Orthodox cemeteries and churches and Protestant memorials during the reporting period.

On November 5, 2004, vandals set fire to wreaths, scattered flowers, and damaged the Star of David at a Holocaust memorial in central Brest. The memorial has been vandalized five times since it was unveiled. Police have never fined or jailed anyone for the crimes. On April 26, 2005, vandals again damaged a memorial erected in Lida to commemorate the Jews who perished there during World War II. The Jewish community did not report the act to the police since the Lida memorial is vandalized every spring and no one has ever been caught. Unidentified vandals smashed 20 gravestones in the town of Mikashevich at the beginning of May 2005. Local Jews criticized police for failing to respond to the crime or arrest any suspects, pointing out that the cemetery is located just a few meters from a police station.

During the period covered by this report, there were no developments in the vandalism cases of Jewish cemeteries in Bobruisk and Cherven and the Holocaust memorial complex in Timkovichi.

The Jewish community is concerned by the concept of a "greater Slavic union" that is popular among nationalist organizations active in the country, including the Russian National Union (RNU), which still exists despite officially dissolving in 2000, and the National Bolshevik Party, another Russian extremist organization. In January 2004, RNU members in Gomel distributed anti-Semitic literature on city buses. This incident occurred the same month Jewish community centers in Gomel and Polotsk were vandalized with RNU graffiti. Authorities have launched investigations into these acts of vandalism. During the period covered by this report, a website was created, purporting to be the website of the Jewish Orthodox Skinheads (JOSH), an organization supposedly made up of Jewish youths to combat anti-Semitism and xenophobia. Despite the "organization's" stated goals, the website calls upon Jews to commit provocative acts against the Government to support their cause, and includes language defaming non-Jewish citizens and prominent local Jewish leaders. Several Jewish leaders, all of whom consider the website to be offensive and provocative, have denounced the website, and have expressed their concerns to government authorities. The website includes a link to another website purported to be run by Hare Krishna skinheads. Defamatory websites of the so-called Jewish Orthodox Skinheads and Hare Krishna Skinheads continued to operate during the reporting period, despite being denounced by Jewish leaders and others.

The official local Orthodox prayer calendar, printed in Minsk, continues to mark May 20 as the anniversary of the 1690 death of Gavriil Belostoksky, a young child who is alleged to have been murdered by Jews near Grodno. The May 20 prayer for Belostoksky makes reference to Jewish persons as "real beasts" who allegedly kidnapped and murdered Belostoksky for religious purposes.

Leaders in the Jewish community believe fewer cases of vandalism occur now than just a few years ago, partly due to international pressure as well as to stepped up efforts by local authorities to protect religious sites. In addition, local authorities and citizens often restore damaged memorials and graves at personal expense. Ac-

ording to the CRNA, regional authorities nationwide continued to take measures to prevent vandalism, including erecting fences around cemeteries, conducting regular police patrols of cemeteries, and collecting and reporting of incidents of vandalism.

As in previous years, unknown vandals continued to destroy crosses, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, erected at Kurapaty, an area used by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) to murder more than 300,000 people in the 1930s. However, a plaque commemorating the loss of Muslim and Jewish lives there remained undisturbed. The authorities made no visible attempts to find those responsible for the cross destruction.

On October 23, 2004, thieves stole 12 icons and a bronze cross from a BOC church in the Brest region. Police opened an investigation. Earlier in October 2004, Brest regional police and Minsk city police captured two icon thieves and recovered two of three icons they stole in 2001. The two recovered were worth more than \$75,000.

In April 2004, local authorities in Brest oblast refused to initiate a criminal investigation into the burglary of an evangelical Christian church in the town of Khotislav burglarized in March 2004. Since 2000, the church had reportedly been vandalized six times prior to the latest incident. In 2004, the BAOC claimed that BOC clergy, accompanied by Minsk Oblast officials, visited several towns in Minsk oblast and called upon local villagers not to participate in BAOC religious services.

There is no indication that the BOC has changed its view that it will cooperate only with religious faiths that have "historical roots" in the country.

In January 2004, the Civil Initiative for Religious Freedom published the second installment of the White Book, a collection of documents that detailed the Government's many abuses of religious freedom, information about the religion law, and copies of various reports about the religious freedom situation in the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy staff maintained regular contact with representatives of religious groups and government officials responsible for religious affairs, and met with resident and visiting U.S. citizens of various religious faiths to discuss religious freedom issues in the country.

During meetings with various government officials and ministers, Embassy staff raised such issues as the 2002 religion law, the continued sale of intolerant literature at locations affiliated with the Government and the BOC, and registration denials of certain religious communities. Embassy staff also raised the issue of Government passivity in the face of intolerant acts and attempts to preserve the religious status quo through discriminatory action.

The Embassy monitored the continued sale of anti-Semitic and xenophobic literature at stores and events linked with the BOC and state media distributors. Throughout the period covered by this report, Embassy staff also visited the site of the Jewish cemetery in Grodno on several occasions and met with local officials and community leaders to discuss the situation. Embassy staff, including the Ambassador, attended several events hosted by various religious groups. The Embassy also discussed religious issues with representatives of foreign diplomatic missions in the country.

BELGIUM

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. However, the Government continued to observe and research groups that a parliamentary commission's unofficial report labeled "harmful sects."

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Some Muslim community leaders and spokespersons for non-recognized religions cited instances of discrimination by government officials. There were also isolated instances of discrimination by private individuals.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, the United States urged government officials to intensify their efforts to fight

anti-Semitism, racism, and promote religious freedom, and has cooperated with the Belgian government on Muslim outreach programs.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,780 square miles, and its population is approximately 10.3 million.

The population is predominantly Roman Catholic. According to the 2001 Survey and Study of Religion, jointly conducted by a number of the country's universities and based on self-identification, approximately 47 percent of the population identify themselves as belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. According to these figures, the Muslim population numbers approximately 364,000, and there are an estimated 328 mosques in the country. Protestants number between 125,000 and 140,000. The Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches have approximately 70,000 adherents. The Jewish population is estimated at between 45,000 and 55,000. The Anglican Church has approximately 10,800 members. The larger non-recognized religions include Jehovah's Witnesses (25,000), independent Protestant congregations, Adventists, the Church of Scientology, Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and Hare Krishnas.

Estimates indicate that approximately 15 percent of the population does not identify with any religion. Approximately 7.4 percent of the population describes itself as "laic" (members of nonconfessional philosophical organizations), and another 1.1 percent belongs to organized laity that receives funding for its programs.

According to a 1999 survey by an independent academic group, 11.2 percent of the Roman Catholic population attends weekly religious services; the Catholic Church has estimated that church attendance ranges between 10–15 percent. Religion plays a role in major life events. As of 1999, with regard to the Catholic population, 65 percent of the children born in the country were baptized; 49.2 percent of couples opted for a religious marriage; and 76.6 percent of funerals included religious services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government accords "recognized" status to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism (including evangelicals and Pentecostals), Judaism, Anglicanism, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity (Greek and Russian). Representative bodies for these religions receive subsidies from government revenues. The Government also supports the freedom to participate in laic organizations. These secular humanist groups serve as a seventh recognized "religion," and their organizing body, the Central Council of Non-Religious Philosophical Communities of Belgium, receives funds and benefits similar to those of the six recognized religions.

The Federal Government and Parliament have responsibility for recognizing faiths and paying the wages and pensions of ministers of those faiths.

As a result of constitutional reforms enacted by Parliament in 2001, religious instruction, financial accountability of religious groups, and religious buildings have become the jurisdiction of the regional governments. Laic organizations remain under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities.

By law, each recognized religion has the right to provide teachers at government expense for religious instruction in public schools. The Government also pays the salaries, retirement benefits, and lodging costs of ministers and subsidizes the construction and renovation of religious buildings for recognized religions. The ecclesiastical administrations of recognized religions have legal rights and obligations, and the municipality in which they are located must pay any debts that they incur. Some subsidies are the responsibility of the federal government, while the regional and municipal governments pay others. In 2003, the Government paid salaries for 6,929 ministers of the Catholic faith, 123 ministers of the Protestant Evangelical faith, 14 ministers of the Anglican faith, 41 ministers of the Jewish faith, and 53 ministers of the Orthodox faith. (These figures include part-time functions.) While the Government is prepared to pay salaries for Muslim imams, the Muslim community has not yet finalized a proposal for the Government to do so. For salaries only, this amounted to a total wage cost of 77.2 million euro for the Catholic faith, 2.8 million euro for the Protestant faith, 0.3 million euro for the Anglican faith, 0.7 million euro for the Jewish faith and 1.0 million euro for the Orthodox faith.

In 2004, total outlays for ministers of the faith amounted to 82 million euro, and nine million euro for the laic organizations. As there was no agreement reached on recognizing mosques, 1.7 million euro earmarked for the Muslim faith was not dis-

pensed. For 2005, the budgetary outlays were 79.5 million euro for the recognized faiths, 9.3 million euro for the laic organizations and six million euro for the Muslim faith.

In 2004, the federal government, and the regional governments of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels formally signed a cooperation agreement to put into effect the 2001 Constitutional agreement. This allows the regions to enact their own legislation for the religious and philosophical organizations coming under their jurisdiction.

The Government applies five criteria in deciding whether to grant recognition to a religious group: the religion must have a structure or hierarchy; the group must have a sufficient number of members; the religion must have existed in the country for a long period of time; it must offer a social value to the public; and it must abide by the laws of the State and respect public order. The five criteria are not listed in decrees or laws, and the Government does not formally define "sufficient," "long period of time," or "social value." A religious group seeking official recognition applies to the Ministry of Justice, which then conducts a thorough review before recommending approval or rejection. Final approval of recognized status is the responsibility of the Parliament alone; however, the Parliament generally accepts the decision of the Ministry of Justice. A group whose application is refused by the Ministry of Justice may appeal the decision to the Council of State. No minority religious group has attempted and failed to be registered in the last 3 years.

The lack of recognized status does not prevent a religious group from practicing its faith freely and openly. Nonrecognized groups do not qualify for government subsidies; however, they may qualify for tax-exempt status as nonprofit organizations.

The Muslim faith was recognized in 1974. Since then, the Government has tried to find reliable interlocutors capable of speaking for the entire Muslim community. In 1998, elections for a Muslim Council and a smaller Executive Committee (Executive) were organized to represent the Islamic faith. While the Executive received government funding during the period covered by this report, mosques, imams, and Islamic schools and teachers did not. Subsidies have not been paid to mosques and imams, despite the Government's official recognition in 1998 that the Executive would serve as the administrative instrument for distributing government subsidies. The Government pledged in 2004–05 that as soon as a new Council and Executive were formed it could begin the process of paying approved clergy and teachers. However, regional governments are still in the process of recognizing mosques eligible for funding.

In late 2004, Justice Minister Laurette Onkelinx called new Muslim Council elections; the Council in turn would choose a new Executive. In response to growing concern about radical fundamentalism and links to terrorism in the country, she proposed that candidates for the Executive would be subjected to vetting by the State Security. In early 2005, Parliament adopted legislation providing an improved legal basis for a wide range of security checks. These laws were applied to candidates for the Muslim Executive. These measures and electoral procedures were protested and challenged in court by the outgoing leadership of the Executive Committee, which also promoted a boycott of the elections, which were held on March 20, 2005. The Council of State, the highest court for the matter turned down the appeal.

Only 45,000 registered voters turned up at the polling stations. The low turnout was explained by the election boycott organized by several mosques, especially in Brussels, by the Antwerp-Mechelen based Arab European League (AEL), and also by the outgoing Muslim Executive, who encouraged their largely ethnic North African Arab constituents not to vote. The election resulted in a landslide victory for ethnic Turkish Muslims who won 40 of the 68 Council seats. The ethnic Moroccan community won only 20 seats, despite constituting a substantial majority of the Muslim population. Six seats went to candidates originating from other countries, and two converted Belgians won the remaining seats. In light of the boycott organized by Moroccan mosques and the Muslim Executive, the result was not surprising.

Moreover, the Turkish community of the country had actively prepared for the elections. Thus, the most successful candidates were young Turks, and the most successful was Hacer Duzgun, a young Turkish woman who actively canvassed her Limburg province. She was one of the five women elected to the Council. Her tally of 3,640 votes contrasted starkly with the mere 307 votes won by the leading Moroccan candidate from Brussels, where the largest Muslim community lives. At the first meeting of the new Council, Turkish and Moroccan elected council members found common ground, and chose a Moroccan as head of the Council. Neither the Chairman of the Muslim Executive, chosen by the seventeen-member executive board elected by the council, nor the executive board was selected by the end of the period

covered by this report. The Chairman and the Executive are responsible for direct relations with the federal government and for the payment of support for mosques, clerics and teachers. Most of the Community, including most of those who had boycotted the elections, were waiting to see how the court rules on a challenge to the legislation permitting the elections.

In 1993 the Government established by law the Center for Equal Opportunity and the Struggle against Racism. Commonly known as the Anti-Racism Center, it is an independent agency responsible for all non-gender related discrimination, including religious. Although formally part of the Office of the Prime Minister, it is under the guidance of the Ministry of Social Integration. Its head is appointed by the Prime Minister for six years, but the Prime Minister may not remove the individual once appointed. Several nongovernmental organizations such as the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia, the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme and the Liga voor Mensenrechten are also active in promoting religious freedom. The Government hosted an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) conference against Racism in September 2004, to follow the May OSCE Anti-Semitism Conference in Berlin.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Ministry of Justice and Parliament continued to observe and monitor some of the nonrecognized religious groups that were included in a 1997 parliamentary committee report on "harmful sects."

A special Parliamentary Commission was established to examine the potential dangers posed by sects and issued a report in 1997 that divided sects into two broadly defined categories. Although there are no illegal sects as such, the commission defined the first category of "respectable" sects as "organized groups of individuals espousing the same doctrine with a religion," which reflect the normal exercise of freedom of religion and assembly provided for by fundamental rights. The commission defined the second category, "harmful sectarian organizations," as groups having or claiming to have a philosophical or religious purpose and whose organization or practice involves illegal or injurious activities, harm to individuals or society, or impairment of human dignity.

The report included as an annex an alphabetical list of the 189 religious sectarian organizations with comments. Although the introduction to the list stated that there was no intent to characterize any of the groups as "dangerous," the list quickly became known in the press and to the public as the "dangerous sects" list. The Parliament eventually adopted two of the report's recommendations, establishing two new government bodies, but it never adopted the list, which has no legal standing.

Some religious groups such as the Church of Scientology and the Jehovah's Witnesses included in the 1997 parliamentary list continued to complain that their inclusion has resulted in discriminatory action against them. In 2003, a report issued by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights asserted that the Government had not taken any effective measures to counteract the hostility and discrimination suffered by members of religious groups depicted as "sects." The Government has not responded, claiming that there have been no official complaints.

As a result of the committee report, Parliament passed a law establishing two bodies: a group monitoring harmful sects and an interagency coordinating group on harmful sects. The first body, the Center for Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations, collects publicly available information on a wide range of religious and philosophical groups and provides information and advice to the public upon request regarding the legal rights of freedom of association, privacy, and freedom of religion. There are eight board members who are allowed to serve a renewable 6-year term. The Center's library is open to the public and contains information on religion in general, as well as on specific religious groups, including information provided by those groups. The Center has the authority to share with the public any information it collects on religious sects; however, it does not have the authority to provide assessments of individual sectarian organizations to the general public. Despite its name, the regulations prohibit it from categorizing any particular group as harmful. Testifying behind closed doors for the House of Representatives working group on sects, the head of the Center told House members that in 2004 the Center had received more than 500 inquiries about sectarian organizations. Seventeen percent of the queries came from public institutions. Reportedly there were a growing number of questions about evangelical and Pentecostal (8 percent) churches. Most queries (21 percent) concerned Jehovah's witnesses. Some inquiries (12 percent) related to faith healing.

The second body established by Parliament, the Interagency Coordination Group, deals primarily with confidential material and works with the legal and security in-

stitutions of the Government to coordinate government policy. In theory it meets quarterly to exchange information on sect activities; however, it met only once during the period covered by this report. It produces no publicly available reports. The Government also has designated the Federal Prosecutor and a magistrate in each of the 27 judicial districts to monitor cases involving sects.

The 1997 parliamentary report also recommended that municipal governments sponsor information campaigns to educate the public, especially children, about the phenomenon of harmful sects. A 1998 law formally charges the country's State Security Service with the duty of monitoring harmful sectarian organizations, including radical Islamic groups, as potential threats to the internal security of the country. A subgroup of law enforcement officials meets bimonthly to exchange information on sect activities. Most law enforcement agencies have an official specifically assigned to handle sect issues; however, they act only on the basis of filed complaints.

There have been no prosecutions of harmful sects; however, in 2003, as part of a criminal investigation, a prosecutor froze approximately \$375,000 in a Belgian Church of Scientology bank account on suspicion of money laundering. Later in 2003, the prosecutor unfroze those funds; however, he continued to direct a prior criminal investigation into the activities of certain Belgian Church of Scientology officials on suspicion of fraud, privacy violations, and criminal association. The investigation began in 1997, and the Belgian Church's offices were raided in 1999.

In 2004, the criminal investigation into the Belgian Church of Scientology's operations was completed and the file delivered to the prosecuting office. By the end of the period covered in this report, no charges had yet been formally filed. The Church also came under attack from a Member of Parliament Andre Frederic who chairs the House of Representatives working group on sects. He complained to the press about the Church's "intense lobbying." Early in 2005, at the peak of the tsunami help effort, he addressed a letter to the Foreign Minister, urging the minister to make sure that Church of Scientology aid workers would not make use of aid and funds sent by the country.

In 2002, a suspect in the criminal investigation discovered a report on the Church of Scientology compiled by the State Security Service. The report analyzed Church of Scientology activities and doctrine internationally as well as locally. Since late 2003, the Church of Scientology International has sought to establish a dialogue with the Government to address government information and analysis contained in this report and elsewhere, although without success.

In 2003, the International Church of Scientology opened its European Office for Public Affairs and Human Rights in Brussels. The print and broadcast media stated that the Government had declared the Church "harmful" in 1997. The opening of this office, in spite of that determination, was cited by at least one leading publication as reason to increase the budget of the Center for Information and Advice on Harmful Sects. The Government did not directly dispute these allegations; however, government officials regularly stated that there was no official list of "harmful sects." The International Church continued to operate unhindered by government action, although some local permits for the Belgian Church's activities were denied, in part based on the Church's appearance on the "harmful sects list."

The Mormon Church continues to express some concerns about obtaining visas for its missionaries. Mormon missionaries, who work as unpaid volunteers, do not qualify to obtain the work permits necessary to obtain visas under the Foreign Worker's Act of 1999, because of the unrecognized status of the Church of Latter-day Saints. In June 2002, through the efforts of Church officials and the U.S. Embassy, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to exempt volunteer Mormon missionaries from the certificate requirement. Since then, there were no reports of any restrictions on the activities of visa recipients. In 2003, Mormon Church representatives appealed to the Government to formalize the agreement in writing. However, the Government has not done so, stating it would set a legal precedent that other non-religious foreign workers could try to exploit.

In October 2004, the city of Brussels reneged on a contract with the Genealogical Society of Utah for digitalizing the city archives, free of charge. A city official explained that Brussels did not want to become associated with the Mormon Church, "an organization appearing on the parliamentary sects list."

Some courts in the Flanders region have stipulated, in the context of child custody proceedings and as a condition of granting visitation rights, that a noncustodial parent who is a member of Jehovah's Witnesses may not expose his or her children to the teachings or lifestyle of that religious group during visits. These courts claimed that such exposure would be harmful to the child; however, other courts have not imposed this restriction, and other sources state that custody issues rather than religion prompted the decisions.

Religious or “moral” instruction was mandatory in public schools, and provided according to the student’s religious or nonreligious preference. All public schools offered a teacher for each of the six recognized religions. A seventh choice, a non-confessional or secular moral instruction course was available if the child did not wish to attend a religious course. Public school religion teachers were nominated by a committee from their religious group and appointed by the Minister of Education. Private authorized religious schools that follow the same curriculum as the public schools were known as “Free” schools, and receive government subsidies for working expenses and teacher salaries. Almost all of “Free” schools were Roman Catholic, and they offered only Roman Catholic religious instruction.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, several religious groups report incidents of discrimination, particularly Jews and Muslims, as well as religious groups that have not been accorded official “recognized” status by the Government.

Prejudice in the private sector against members of the Muslim community was not unknown, affecting housing, employment and in some cases education. However, these prejudices affected primarily the North African communities (including both immigrant and first-generation). Muslims of Turkish and other national origins appeared to be far less frequently the targets of such prejudice, which can be described as more ethnic than religious.

In one instance of obvious religious discrimination, a Muslim woman of Turkish origin resigned her job with a food packing concern in Flanders, after she and her employer received multiple threats. The woman was singled out because she wore a Muslim headscarf. When the story broke, however, public outcry encouraged her to go back to work and the employer insisted he would not give in to threats. The police arrested a suspect, and the prosecution was being prepared.

The Jewish community registered 46 anti-Semitic incidents during 2004. Most incidents took place in Antwerp and to a lesser extent in Brussels. The remaining incidents occurred in Knokke, Ghent, Charleroi and Hasselt. Verbal abuse was the most common complaint. There were nine physical attacks registered, of which seven took place in Antwerp. As in the past, the incidents appeared to be generated from the Muslim immigrant community. In one incident in late 2004, a local youth soccer team was suspended from play and its government funding cut off after the team directed anti-Semitic slogans at its opponent, a Jewish-organized Maccabi team. While the punishments were suspended several months later, the point was made. In general, following visible engagement of the Government, the incidence and severity of violent anti-Semitic incidents appeared to significantly decline, especially in the first half of 2005, compared to the previous year.

In mid 2004, the Government launched a major effort to address anti-Semitism, coordinated by the then-Minister for Social Affairs and the Justice Ministry. This effort included enhanced protection of Jewish sites and events, stepped up investigative and prosecutorial efforts, and education.

King Albert II and the Government carried out a highly visible campaign of support for the Jewish community, and addressed some of the issues of the country’s past. In January 2005, both King Albert II and Prime Minister Verhofstadt led a delegation including prominent Jewish community representatives to the 60th Anniversary commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz in Poland. A joint overseas visit by both the heads of state and government was without precedent. The following month, after a visit by the Foreign Minister to Israel, the Prime Minister went to Jerusalem for the commemoration of the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial complex. There, even more explicitly than he had at Auschwitz, Verhofstadt apologized for the actions of some Belgians in abetting the Holocaust. Such public displays boosted morale in the Jewish community and appeared to have helped deter anti-Semitic incidents.

The Center for Equal Opportunity and the Fight against Racism, an independent government agency, reported that 7.5 percent of the discrimination complaints filed

with the Center during 2002 cited religion as the basis of the alleged discrimination. In June 2005, the Center released a report covering 2004, which provided, among other topics, information on anti-Semitism.

At the national level, there is an annual general assembly of the National Ecumenical Commission to discuss various religious themes. The Catholic Church sponsors working groups at the national level to maintain dialogue and promote tolerance among all religious groups. At the local level, every Catholic diocese has established commissions for interfaith dialogue. The President of the National Ecumenical Commission maintains contacts with leaders of other faiths, including both recognized and unrecognized religious groups.

In March 2005, the Center for Equal Opportunity issued a comprehensive report on public symbols of religious and philosophical convictions. The 2003 act made discrimination on religious and philosophical grounds unlawful. The report found that neither Flemish nor Francophone schools imposed restrictions given by the governing authorities and that it was left to the individual schoolmasters to decide on what signs would be tolerated. Most schoolmasters in the country imposed a headscarf ban for both pupils and teachers. A survey released in 2004 showed that in Brussels, of 110 surveyed schools, only 8 allowed headscarves. Schools on both sides of the Belgian linguistic border allow free days for attending religious festivals. The public educational system, from kindergarten to university, requires strict neutrality for teaching personnel, except for teachers of religion. The subsidized Catholic educational institution (which constitutes the largest number of educational establishments nationwide) allows the wearing of religious symbols. Schoolmasters also opposed the invoking of religious grounds for not attending certain courses, physical education classes in particular.

The federal government has no specific directives on wearing religious symbols. The same applies in regional and municipal services. Wearing religious symbols is prohibited for selected public service officials, such as judges, police, and other uniformed officials.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

U.S. Embassy representatives have discussed the issue of religious freedom with officials from the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Social Integration, and Interior, as well as with Members of Parliament, and regional and local officials.

Embassy officials expressed concern regarding anti-Semitic incidents and urged the Government to intensify its efforts to counter this trend. Following Embassy engagement with both Federal and language community officials, supporting the efforts of the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, the country formally applied to join the international Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The application had been delayed because of the overlapping competencies on the issue among the federal, regional and language community governments, but all eventually agreed to provide the needed funding.

The Embassy hosted individual events specifically for the Jewish, Catholic and Muslim leaders to encourage dialogue with the U.S. Government, the latter as part of a wider program of outreach to the Muslim community. Embassy officials also met with representatives of both recognized and nonrecognized religions that reported some form of discrimination during the period covered by this report.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The State Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entity constitutions of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS) provide for freedom of religion, and individuals generally enjoy this right in ethnically integrated areas or in areas where they are adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of religions in largely ethnically homogenous areas where they are in a small minority have had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently. The state-level Law on Religious Freedom, enacted in January 2004, also provides comprehensive rights to religious communities and confers upon them a legal status not previously held in the country.

Overall, respect for religious freedom declined during the reporting period: the number of attacks on religious officials and religious buildings increased markedly. A number of illegally constructed religious objects continued to cause ethnic/reli-

religious tension and conflict in a number of communities. Religious communities continued to support and advocate refugee returns for their respective constituencies; however, the number of returns significantly declined during the reporting period. The return process suffered from a lack of funding for reconstruction of housing and infrastructure, local governments' inability or unwillingness to provide necessary services to allow for sustainable returns, and a lack of employment opportunities. The state Law on Religious Freedom protecting the rights of religious communities and creating a government registry allowing them to establish legal status was being implemented by the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious intolerance in the country directly reflects ethnic intolerance because of the virtually indistinguishable identification of ethnicity with one's religious background. Bosniaks generally are associated with Islam, Bosnian Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs with the Serb Orthodox Church. The Jewish community maintains a very small but important presence in Bosnian society. Despite the constitutional and legal provisions protecting religious freedom, discrimination against religious minorities occurs in virtually all parts of the country. In some communities, local religious leaders and politicians contributed to intolerance and an increase in nationalist feeling through public statements and on occasion in sermons. Religious symbols were often misused for political purposes.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from the four traditional religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and reconciliation.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country's territory is divided into two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS), with a separate administrative district in Brcko. The country has an area of 19,781 square miles. In June 2004, the State Agency for Statistics estimated that the population was 3.8 million, although a reliable census has not been conducted since 1991. Reliable statistics on the precise membership of different religious groups remain unavailable.

Ethnic groups identify very closely with distinct religions or religious/cultural traditions, including the predominantly Muslim Bosniaks, the predominantly Roman Catholic Croats, and the predominantly Orthodox Serbs. According to the U.N. Development Program's Human Development Report 2002, Muslims constitute 40 percent of the population, Serb Orthodox 31 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, Protestants 4 percent, and other groups 10 percent. The small Jewish community has approximately 1,000 believers and maintains a special place in society by virtue of its long history of coexistence with other religious communities and its active role in mediating among those communities. There are also foreign missionaries who preach fundamentalist forms of Islam that tend to be intolerant of other religions and other forms of Islam. There are some reports that Muslims have been offered economic incentives to worship and/or dress in a way that is different from traditional Bosnian Muslim custom.

The rate of religious observance remains relatively low among the traditional religious groups; however, some areas of significantly greater observance do exist, for example among Roman Catholic Croats in the Herzegovina region. For many Bosnian Muslims, religion often serves as a community or ethnic identifier, and religious practice is confined to occasional visits to the mosque or significant rites of passage such as birth, marriage, and death. Nevertheless, religious leaders from the Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox communities claim that all forms of observance are increasing among young people as an expression of increased identification with their ethnic heritage, in large part due to the national religious revival that occurred as a result of the 1992–95 Bosnian war. Younger believers who grew up in the post-Communist period also have had more freedom to practice their religions and more access to religious education. Leaders from the three main religious communities observed that they enjoy greater support from their believers in rural areas of Bosnia than from those in urban centers such as Sarajevo or Banja Luka.

Ethnic cleansing during the 1992–95 war caused internal migration and refugee flows, which almost completely segregated the population into separate ethno-religious areas. Increased levels of returns, which peaked in 2002, continued to slow significantly in 2004–05, leaving the majority of Serb Orthodox adherents living in the RS and the majority of Muslims and Catholics still living in the Federation. Within the Federation, distinct Muslim and Catholic majority areas remain. However, returns of Serb Orthodox adherents and Muslims in recent years to their prewar homes in western Bosnia and Muslims to their prewar homes in eastern Bosnia have shifted notably the ethno-religious composition in both areas. Returns of Catholics to central Bosnia also took place in smaller numbers.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are eight muftis located in major municipalities across the country: Sarajevo, Bihac, Travnik, Tuzla, Gorazde, Zenica, Mostar, and Banja Luka. The more conservative Islamic communities in Bosnia are located in the Federation in cities such as Travnik, Boinja/Zavidovici, Tesanj, Maglaj, Bugojno, and Zenica. Bosnia's Roman Catholic community maintains its Bishops' Conference as an overarching organizational and regional structure, with bishops residing in Mostar, Banja Luka, and Sarajevo; the Franciscan order maintains its strongest presence in Central Bosnia near Sarajevo and in Herzegovina. The Serb Orthodox Church maintains greater influence in the eastern RS, with the most influential bishops residing in Trebinje and Bijeljina. The small Jewish community, like most other small religious groups in Bosnia including Protestants, has its strongest support in Sarajevo.

Missionary activity is limited, but growing, and includes a small number of representatives from the following organizations, some of which have their central offices for the region in Zagreb or another European city outside of the country: Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Krishna Consciousness, and the Baptist Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The State Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and individuals generally enjoyed this right in ethnically integrated areas or in areas where they were adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of minority religions in areas where one group represented an overwhelming majority had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently. The constitutions of both entities also provide for freedom of religion.

The State Constitution attempts to safeguard the rights of the three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats), and by extension the three largest religious communities, by providing proportional representation for each group in Government and in the military. As a result of the government structure created by the Dayton agreement, which ended the Bosnian conflict in 1995, parliamentary seats and most government positions are apportioned specifically to members of the three "constituent peoples." These stipulations often result in constitutional discrimination against "others" and sympathizers of certain faiths who do not fit neatly into these three groups. For example, the country has a three-member joint Presidency composed of one representative chosen specifically from each of the three major ethnic groups, with a chairmanship that rotates every 8 months. As an attempt to address this lack of opportunity for members of other religious faiths, the president of the Jewish community—again, by virtue of the Jewish community's general impartiality in the political arena—was by common consensus accorded the leadership of the important Civil Service Agency, which is tasked with selecting civil servants for government posts based on merit as opposed to political ties, ethnicity, or religious affiliation.

Bosnia's state-level Government does not officially recognize any religious holidays. Entity and cantonal authorities routinely recognize religious holidays celebrated by members of the area's majority religion, with government and public offices closed on those days.

The state Law on Religious Freedom governs religion and the licensing of religious groups, and provides for the right of all to freedom of conscience and religion in Bosnia. It grants churches and religious communities legal status and allows them concessions that are characteristic of a nongovernmental organization (NGO). The law also creates a unified register for all religions within the Bosnian Ministry of Justice, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees is tasked with documenting every violation of religious freedom. The four traditional religious communities in the country (Muslim, Catholic, Serb Orthodox, and Jewish) were required to re-register in the central registry book but did not need to submit all the documents required to register a new religious community. According to the provisions of the law, any group of 300 adult citizens may form a new church or religious community with a written application to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice will issue a decision within 30 days of the application, and an appeal may be made to the Bosnian Council of Ministers. The law, which came into force in March 2004, allows minority religions in the country to register legally and to operate without unwarranted restrictions. Some small religious communities have complained that the registration procedure is excessively bureaucratic and complex and that the Ministry of Justice is not issuing decisions in a timely fashion.

Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remained powerful and continued to identify closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic

group. Some political parties claimed to be multiethnic. Some clerics have characterized hard-line nationalist political sympathies as part of “true” religious practice. Some religious leaders were also significantly involved in politics.

The lines dividing politics and religion are often blurred, particularly during pre-election periods, when religious sermons and services are sometimes misused for campaigning purposes. Many political party leaders are former Communists who have manipulated the core attributes of their particular ethnic group, including religion, to strengthen their credibility with voters. For example, offices of local Bosnian Serb mayors in the RS are often decorated with religious icons, although few officials practice religion in any meaningful sense.

During the reporting period, the entity, cantonal, and municipal governments gave varying levels of financial support to the four major religious communities. Religious communities tended to receive the most funding in areas where their adherents were in the majority. Religious education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is largely decentralized, as is the education system generally. The canton and entity governments and the Brcko District authorities have responsibility for education; there is no national education ministry or policy. Public schools offer religious education classes, but with the exception of Brcko, schools generally offer religious instruction only in the area’s majority religion. In theory, students (or their parents, in the case of primary school students) have the option to choose not to attend these classes. However, in practice, students of the majority religion and sometimes also of minority religions face pressure from teachers and peers to attend the classes. For example, the RS requires Serbs to attend Orthodox religion classes but does not require attendance for Bosniaks and Croats. However, Bosniak and Croat students often attend these classes anyway because they are reluctant to be singled out as different from their classmates. If a sufficient number of students of minority religion(s) attend a particular school (20 in the RS, 15 in the Federation), the school is required to organize religion classes on their behalf. However, in rural areas, there are usually no qualified religious representatives available to teach religious studies to the handful of minority students. Minority students are often widely scattered across remote areas, making it logistically difficult to provide classes even when a teacher is available. In the Federation’s five cantons with Bosniak majorities, schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a 2-hour per week elective course.

In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, Konjic, and Zenica/Vares, students may attend Catholic school centers. Although primarily Croat, these schools are open to students of other ethnicities/faiths. These centers have both primary and secondary schools, and although the principals are priests, the schools are open to all faiths and the majority of teachers are not religious officials. The curriculum is identical to the curriculum applied in schools in areas with a majority Croat population. In cantons with Croat majorities, all Croat students attend the “elective” 1-hour weekly Catholic religion course for primary and middle schools.

The state Law on Religious Freedom reaffirms the right of every citizen to religious education. The law calls for an official representative of the various churches or religious communities to be responsible for teaching religious studies in all public and private preschools, primary schools, and universities throughout Bosnia. However, by the end of the reporting period, this provision of the Law on Religious Freedom had not been fully implemented. Its implementation is difficult in Bosnia’s often-segregated school systems, particularly where there is political resistance from nationalist party officials at the municipal level.

The Office of the High Representative (OHR), the international administrator for Bosnia established by the Dayton Accords, endorsed a May 2000 declaration signed by the Federation and RS Ministers of Education calling for the introduction of countrywide courses on “Democracy and Human Rights” and the “Culture of Religion.” The democracy course continues to be implemented by the U.S.-funded Civitas civic education program as part of the official school curriculum throughout the country. The Civitas course on democracy and human rights is the only part of the curriculum that is taught the same way in every secondary school in the country. The U.S. Government maintains close cooperation with Islamic secondary schools (madrassahs) and Islamic studies faculties at the university level.

The country’s four traditional religious communities all have extensive claims for restitution of property that the government of the former Yugoslavia nationalized after World War II and did not return. The state Law on Religious Freedom provides religious communities the right to restitution of expropriated property throughout the country “in accordance with the law.” However, there is still no state-level law on restitution, and both entity governments have deferred any real attempt to resolve the issue. The State Commission for Restitution was established during the period covered by this report and was working on drafting a state restitution law. In the absence of state legislation, return of former religious properties

continued on an ad hoc basis at the discretion of municipal officials. For example, the Orthodox Bishop's residence and an Islamic community building were recently reconstructed by municipal authorities and returned to the Serb Orthodox and Muslim communities in Mostar. Mostar officials also returned a formerly nationalized apartment building to the Catholic community. In Travnik, municipal officials agreed to return a school building that was housing a public primary school to the Catholic community as part of its Catholic school center. In May 2005, local authorities in Trebinje in the eastern RS returned a commercial building to the Islamic community.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restricted religious freedom and posed major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases, local governments and police made improvements in protecting religious freedoms, although serious problems remained, including an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom occur. For example, local police rarely made arrests in cases of attacks against religious buildings, officials, or believers. Successful prosecutions are extremely rare. Local police frequently allege that juveniles are responsible for these attacks.

Deputies being sworn into the RS National Assembly may choose either a religious oath consistent with their religious tradition or a nonreligious civil oath. Deputies to the State and Federation Parliaments take nonreligious civil oaths.

The State Constitution provides for proportional representation for each of the three major ethnic groups in the Government and the military. Because of the close identification of ethnicity with religious background, this principal of ethnic parity in effect reserves certain positions in Government and the military for adherents or sympathizers of certain faiths. The military in the RS is staffed overwhelmingly by ethnic Serbs and has only Serb Orthodox chaplains. The Federation military is composed of separate Bosniak and Croat units, as well as integrated units, and has both Muslim and Catholic chaplains. The Federation passed laws during the period covered by this report creating a state-level Ministry of Defense that would integrate the two entity-based armed forces under a unified command and control, but the mechanics of integrating the chaplain services still remained an open question.

In early post-war years, RS authorities frequently did not intervene to prevent the violent obstruction of efforts to rebuild some of the 618 mosques and 129 churches in the RS that were destroyed or significantly damaged during the 1992–95 war. The most recent such incident was in 2001 when a violent protest disrupted the laying of the cornerstone for the reconstruction of the historic Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka. Local police also subsequently failed to conduct a serious investigation into most of these incidents. In Zvornik, the Islamic community and the city continued negotiations over an alternative mosque site, although by the end of the period covered by this report, the negotiations had failed to reach a satisfactory conclusion, and the issue continued to be a source of contention.

During the reporting period, the municipality of Travnik in the Federation partially complied with a 2003 decision by the Human Rights Chamber (now the Constitutional Court) ordering the municipal government to relocate a public school housed in a building formerly owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese. The municipality returned half the building to the Archdiocese for use as part of its Catholic school center. However, the other half remained in use as a public school. Negotiations to relocate the public school were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

In the absence of a law governing property restitution, municipal and cantonal authorities have broad discretion regarding disposition of contested property nationalized under the Communist government of the former Yugoslavia. Many officials use property restitution cases as a tool of political patronage, rendering religious leaders dependent on politicians to regain property taken from religious communities. Other unresolved restitution claims are politically and legally complicated. For example, the Serb Orthodox Church is seeking the return of the building which currently houses the University of Sarajevo's Economic Faculty and compensation for the land on which the state Parliament building is located. The Jewish and Muslim communities also have claims to substantial portions of what is now prime Sarajevo commercial real estate. The Catholic community has a large number of potential claims in Banja Luka.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The RS and Federation Governments, local governments, and police forces frequently allowed an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom could take place. Reported attacks on religious buildings, officials, and minority believers in-

creased significantly during the reporting period. The misuse of religious symbols and buildings for political purposes had a negative impact on interreligious dialogue and interethnic relations in many communities. The absence of a police force willing to protect religious minorities, and a judicial system willing to prosecute crimes against those minorities, posed major obstacles to safeguarding minority rights. While new officers continue to be accepted into the police academies under strictly observed ethnic quotas, the goal of establishing effective, professional, multiethnic police forces throughout the country will take years of concentrated effort. Administrative and financial obstacles to rebuilding religious structures impeded the ability of religious minorities to worship freely and contributed to the slow return of minority refugees in many areas.

A significant number of citizens remained internally displaced or refugees abroad following the 1992–95 war. Virtually all had fled areas where their ethno-religious community had been in the minority or had ended up in the minority as a result of the war. Both organized and spontaneous returns peaked in 2002, and they continued to fall sharply in 2004–05.

There were a number of controversial and highly politicized cases involving the illegal construction of religious buildings or monuments on private or government-owned land. In these cases, the buildings or monuments were built to send a political message to minority believers about the dominance of the majority ethno-religious group in that area, creating ethnic tensions and impeding the process of reconciliation. Three significant cases remained unresolved during the reporting period: the presence of a Serb Orthodox Church on the property of a Bosnian Muslim woman in the RS town of Konjevic Polje, despite the absence of local Serb residents; the presence of a Serb Orthodox Church, again in the absence of Orthodox believers, in the middle of a majority Islamic community in the RS town of Divic; and the presence of a large stone cross and cement foundations for the stations of the cross in the ethnically divided town of Stolac in Herzegovina. In contrast, during the reporting period, the Islamic community decided to voluntarily remove the illegally constructed mosque on property formerly owned by the Serb Orthodox Church in Bradina near Konjic.

In May 2004, the Federation Minister of Spatial Planning ordered the removal of the Stolac stone cross and cross foundations, and after a number of delays in response to political and religious sensitivities, a lawsuit was filed in April 2005 which prevented the implementation of the removal order pending a ruling by the Constitutional Court. In May 2005, Bosnian Croat residents of Stolac completed the illegal construction of a cross-shaped monument to Croats killed during World War Two in the partisan-run prisoner of war camp in Bleiburg, Austria. The monument is illegal because Bosnian law prohibits new construction within a 2-kilometer (1.2 mile) radius of a national historic monument (in this case, an archeological site containing medieval tombstones).

Numerous incidents against religious targets in all three ethnic majority areas were reported throughout 2004 and the first half of 2005. All the major religious communities in the country reported a significant increase in the number of incidents during the period covered by this report.

There were a number of incidents directed at Bosniak Muslims during the period covered by this report. In October 2004, two suspects were arrested for damaging a mosque in the eastern RS town of Visegrad. The vandalism took place during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. In January 2005, the building of the Islamic community in Foca in the RS was vandalized. In April 2005, unknown perpetrators wrote insulting graffiti on the Sefer Begova mosque in Banja Luka. In May 2005, 26 graves in the historic Muslim cemetery in Prnjavor in the RS were desecrated. An investigation by local police was ongoing. In June 2005, several Muslim graves were desecrated in the Brezicani cemetery near Prijedor.

There were also incidents directed at Bosnian Croats and the Roman Catholic Church during the period covered by this report. In November 2004, vandals desecrated a number of tombstones in the Catholic cemetery in Bijelo Polje. In January 2005, windows of the Catholic church in Kladanj in the Federation were broken. In March 2005, 11 former Prijedor police officers charged with war crimes in connection with the 1995 abduction and murder of Catholic priest Tomislav Matanovic and his parents were acquitted of all charges. The prosecutor was appealing this verdict. In May 2005, three graves in Prijedor's Catholic cemetery, including the Matanovic family gravesite, were desecrated.

There were incidents directed against members of the Bosnian Serb Orthodox community during the period covered by this report. In late 2004 and early 2005, anti-Serb graffiti appeared in Sarajevo and nearby Ilidza. In January 2005, unknown perpetrators broke several windows of the Orthodox Church in Trnovac, near Tuzla in the Federation. In March 2005, an Orthodox priest and his assistant were

physically attacked in Dobrinja, near Sarajevo. Religious leaders of the Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish communities publicly condemned this incident, and police arrested the suspected perpetrator. In June 2005, several church flags were stolen from outside the Orthodox Church in Glamoc.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Catholic and Islamic communities conducted several joint projects. For example, in January 2005, the Islamic community magazine Preporod and community magazine Svijetlo Rijeci, of the Franciscans, conducted a joint project in which journalists from Preporod interviewed Cardinal Vinko Puljic, the head of the Catholic Church in the country, and journalists from Svijetlo Rijeci interviewed the Reisu-l-Ulema Mustafa ef Ceric, the head of the Islamic community. The resulting articles were published in both magazines simultaneously and introduced each community to differences and similarities of the two faiths, with the goal of improving mutual understanding and respect.

The Catholic and Orthodox bishops of the country continued to meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest. In February 2005, the Catholic and Orthodox bishops issued a joint statement in honor of the Christmas season. The statement underlined the importance of peace and reconciliation and stressed the commonly shared beliefs of their two Christian faiths.

In April 2005, the Orthodox bishop of Trebinje in Herzegovina, Vladika Grigorije, gave an interview in which he encouraged indicted wartime Serb leaders Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic to voluntarily surrender to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague and to allow the judicial process to determine their guilt or innocence. He also declined to characterize Karadzic and Mladic as heroes of the Serb people.

In May 2005, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, met with members of the Interreligious Council to discuss interfaith dialogue. The Archbishop also delivered a Pentecost sermon at a Franciscan Catholic church in Sarajevo. The Islamic community continued to reconstruct mosques throughout the RS, including those in Bratunac, Seher, and Sucevka. Three mosques were rebuilt and reopened in Banja Luka between July and November 2004. The mosque in Potocari Gornji, near the cemetery for the victims of the Srebrenica massacre, was also being reconstructed. Although in 2003, Foca Mayor Nedeljko Pavlovic and Gorazde Mufti Hamed Efendic agreed to the reconstruction of a Muslim religious facility in Foca, a notoriously hard-line Serb municipality in the RS, there was no indication that reconstruction had begun, in large part because of a lack of funds.

The reconstruction and reconsecration of the historic church of the Serb Orthodox monastery at Zitomislici was completed in May 2005. The church is the oldest Orthodox church in the country, dating from the 14th century.

In June 2005, Bosnian government officials participated in the third Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) conference on anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. The country joined other participants in adopting a declaration that condemned anti-Semitism, supported education about the Holocaust, and emphasized the need to fight against all forms of religious intolerance and discrimination.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Until the 19th century, most of the country's residents identified themselves by religious affiliation. With the rise of Balkan nationalism in the 19th century, the country came to identify itself in ethnic as well as religious terms. This tendency increased during the Communist era when the regime discouraged religious affiliation and targeted religious officials for harassment and persecution, including arrest and detention. Under the Communists, most of the country's population identified themselves by ethnic group or simply as "Yugoslavs." Bosniaks were not considered an ethnic group. Only with the adoption of the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution could Muslims identify themselves as such in the census. Since the country's inde-

pendence, there have continued to be persons who decline to accept either ethnic or religious identification and consider themselves simply Bosnians.

Religious buildings, clerics, and individual believers in any area where they constitute a religious minority bear the brunt of retaliation for discrimination and violence perpetrated by other members of their religious/ethnic groups in areas where those groups constitute the majority. Because they are powerful symbols of religious identification and ethnicity, clerics and religious buildings are favored targets. Most religious leaders severely criticize violence and nationalism against their own group but can be less vocal in condemning acts against members of other groups.

The 1992–95 war was not a religious conflict. However, the association of ethnicity and religion is so close that the bitterness engendered by the war and the large-scale casualties it caused contributed to mutual suspicion and distrust among members of all three major religious groups.

Despite the constitutional and legal provisions for religious freedom, some discrimination against religious minorities occurs in virtually all parts of the country. Discrimination remains a serious problem in the RS, particularly in the eastern RS, and in Croat-dominated areas of the Federation; discrimination against non-Muslims appears also to have worsened in some Bosniak-majority areas where more conservative Islamic communities reside. Some Muslim communities in areas where Wahhabis and other Islamic fundamentalist movements have gained adherents are deeply divided over how to worship, dress, and perform certain religious ceremonies, including funerals.

While Sarajevo, the Bosniak-majority capital of the country, has preserved in part its traditional role as a multiethnic city, complaints of discrimination remained during the period covered by this report. The media continued to discuss the “Islamicization” of Sarajevo, and some non-Muslims reported feeling isolated and marginalized in the nation’s capital. While religious leaders applaud growing religious sentiment among youth, the scars of the war, economic hardship, and a recent history of segregation as a result of post-war returnee movements has in many places also injected a streak of nationalism in the younger generation that at times targeted religious communities.

Numerous buildings belonging to the Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic communities were damaged or destroyed during the 1992–95 war, usually in a deliberate attempt at ethnic intimidation. Despite the increase in issuance of building permits for reconstruction of religious buildings by Federation and RS authorities, the religious communities lack funds to rebuild these facilities.

In the immediate postwar period, the major religious communities avoided reconstruction of the more symbolic religious facilities in the country, such as the Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka, the Aladza mosque in Foca, and the monastery at Plehan near Derventa, but the monastery at Plehan has been partially reconstructed, and efforts are underway to rebuild the church in Plehan with financial support from the Bosnian Croat diaspora. Reconstruction of the historic Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka had not begun by the end of this reporting period, but the Islamic community had the necessary permits and was collecting money to fund the construction.

Acts of anti-Semitism against the small Jewish community in the country were relatively infrequent. In January and February 2005, a Sarajevo-based magazine published an article in which the author denied that the Holocaust happened and another in which he personally attacked the leader of the Jewish community. This article was widely condemned by representatives of other faiths and a variety of political parties in Bosnia. Jewish leaders noted a tendency to mix anti-Israeli sentiment with anti-Semitism, as the general public and the media often failed to distinguish between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitic rhetoric.

In November 2004, a local television station was fined approximately \$30,000 for broadcasting a Ramadan sermon that belittled the religious beliefs of non-Muslims.

Leaders of the Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities have committed themselves publicly to building a durable peace and national reconciliation. The leaders of these four communities participated in the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which operates with the active involvement of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, a U.S.-based NGO, despite occasional significant disagreements. In early 2004, the Catholic Church “froze” its relations with the Council over differences regarding the signing of a bilateral agreement with the Vatican. The Serb Orthodox Church suspended its participation in the Interreligious Council in April 2004 due to differences of opinion regarding a NATO raid on a Serb Orthodox church in Pale, during which a priest and his son were injured. In early 2005, after a joint meeting between Serb Orthodox and Catholic officials, the leaders of both faiths agreed to resume participation in the Interreligious Council, which

continued to meet regularly during the reporting period. The OSCE and the OHR continued to facilitate interfaith meetings at the local level as well.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from all four traditional religious communities in the context of its overall interfaith dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government supports the return of refugees, democratization, and protection of human rights throughout the country. The U.S. Government also encourages leaders from all major religious communities to promote a multiethnic society that is conducive to religious freedom. Strong U.S. Government support for full implementation of the Dayton Accords and a politically moderate, multiethnic Government is intended, over time, to improve respect for religious freedom in the country.

The Ambassador frequently meets with the principal religious leaders, individually and collectively, to urge them to work toward moderation and a multiethnic society. The Ambassador has been involved actively as a member of the Executive Board of the Srebrenica Foundation, which oversees the continued development of the Memorial and Cemetery dedicated to victims of the 1995 massacre of Srebrenica-area Muslim men and boys in Potocari. In 2001, the U.S. Government provided approximately \$1 million to help establish the Srebrenica Memorial and Cemetery in Potocari. International and U.S. Government involvement in this issue has helped advance the process of interethnic reconciliation.

The U.S. Embassy funded the development of the countrywide human rights and democracy courses currently being taught in all Bosnian secondary schools. The U.S. Government also supported the work of the Interreligious Council to promote interreligious dialogue and tolerance and to encourage religious communities to play a constructive role in the development of civil society. The U.S. Government is contributing financial support for the restoration of a historic mosque in the RS town of Foca.

In addition, the Embassy engages in an active outreach program with the religious communities at all levels, including hosting speaking engagements by visiting U.S. academics and lecturers, meeting with faith-based charities, and facilitating a university affiliation to create a department of comparative religious studies. The U.S. Government also developed and funded "The Tolerance Project," which provides curricula and trains educators regarding religious tolerance. This project was being implemented by Boston University.

The Embassy publicly criticizes instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities or buildings and encourages leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to respond equally strongly.

The U.S. provides assistance to train lawyers, judges, prosecutors and law enforcement personnel on human rights issues, including religious freedom, and provides much-needed infrastructure assistance to areas with high rates of refugee return to promote the sustainability of return. Many minority returnees also benefited from U.S.-funded income generation grants, micro-credit loans, and technical assistance to boost agricultural productivity.

BULGARIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law prohibits the public practice of religion by unregistered groups. The Constitution also designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the "traditional" religion.

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; however, discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance, particularly in the media, of some religious groups remained an intermittent problem.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 42,855 square miles, and its population was approximately 7.8 million at the end of 2003, according to the National Statistical Institute. The majority of citizens, estimated at approximately 85 percent, are at least nomi-

nally Orthodox Christians. Muslims make up the largest minority, estimated at approximately 13 percent, while the remainder includes Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Gregorian-Armenian Christians, and others. Among the ethnic-Turkish and Roma minorities, Islam is the predominant religion. While not officially enumerated, academic research estimates up to 40 percent of the population are atheist or agnostic. Official registration of religious organizations is handled by the Sofia City Court; it reported that 61 denominations in addition to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) were registered at the end of January 2005, a 36 percent increase over the previous reporting period.

Some religious minorities are concentrated geographically. The Rhodope Mountains (along the country's southern border with Greece) are home to many Muslims, including ethnic Turks, Roma, and "Pomaks" (descendants of Slavic Bulgarians who converted to Islam centuries ago under Ottoman rule). Ethnic-Turkish and Roma Muslims also live in large numbers in the northeast of the country, primarily in and around the cities of Shumen and Razgrad, as well as along the Black Sea coast. More than half of the country's Roman Catholics are located in the region around Plovdiv. Many members of the country's small Jewish community live in Sofia, Rousse, and along the Black Sea coast. Protestants are dispersed more widely throughout the country. While clear statistics are not available, evangelical Protestant groups have had particular success in attracting numerous converts from among the Roma minority, and areas with large Roma populations tend also to have some of the highest percentages of Protestants.

Although no exact data are available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals, most observers agree that evangelical Protestants tend to participate in religious services more frequently than other religious groups. Members of the country's Roman Catholic community also are regarded as more likely than members of other faiths to attend religious services regularly.

Foreign missionaries from several denominations, including, for example, Protestant churches, the Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Jehovah's Witnesses, are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law prohibits the public practice of religion by unregistered groups. The Constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity, represented by the BOC, as the "traditional" religion; some minority religious communities are perceived as holding historic places in society, such as the Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish religions.

The 2002 Denominations Act allows only legally registered denominations to perform public activities outside their places of worship. The 2002 law transferred responsibility for registering religious groups to the Sofia City Court, which is responsible for maintaining the national register of religious denominations and political parties. The Council of Ministers' Religious Confessions Directorate, which used to be responsible for registering religious groups, provides "expert opinions" on registration matters upon request by the court; however, its overall role remains ambiguous, particularly as regards its administrative oversight and sanctioning functions. All applicants have the right to appeal negative registration decisions to the Court of Appeals. Different denominations acknowledged a general improvement in the registration process since the court took over this responsibility in 2003; however, the International Christian Church complained that its registration took more than a year before it was successfully registered in 2004. Some local branches of nationally-registered denominations experienced problems with local authorities who insisted that the branches be registered locally; however, the 2002 Confessions Act does not have any requirement for local formal registration of denominations.

Representatives of some evangelical Protestant churches reported encountering problems in obtaining permission from local authorities, including the Dobrich and General Toshev municipalities, for public evangelization and proselytization.

A Council of Europe review of the 2002 Denominations Act, prepared in early 2003, highlighted that the provisions dealing with the process of registration specify neither the criteria establishing the basis on which the Court should grant registration nor the grounds on which such registration can be withheld. The act also fails to specify the consequences of failure to register as a religious community or outlines any recourse if a competent court refuses to grant registration.

In October 2004, the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights reviewed draft proposals for amending the 2002 Denominations Act. The changes were introduced by two center-right opposition parties to address the Council of Europe's criticisms of the law, including the law's recognition of the BOC exempting it from the require-

ment of legal registration. The amendments also envisaged special tax exemptions for all religious groups. However, the majority of the Committee's members effectively ignored the Council of Europe's recommendations by rejecting the proposed amendments.

On May 11, 2005, a Sofia City Court judge issued five separate rulings in an attempt to resolve the 18-month-old leadership dispute within the Muslim community. The most important ruling was the decision to officially register Mustafa Alish Hadji as the new Chief Mufti. The dispute broke out as a result of the 2003 election of two different chief muftis by bodies which both claimed to represent the Muslim community. One of the 2003 conferences elected Fikri Sali as the new chief mufti to replace Selim Mehmed; Sali formerly held the position from 1992–94. The other conference was convened by another former chief mufti, Nedim Gendzhev, and selected Ali Hadji Saduk to replace Mehmed. Both conferences submitted documentation to the Sofia City Court listing their respective candidates as the new chief mufti. A registration controversy ensued, leaving no legally recognized successor to Mehmed.

On March 8, 2004, two Sofia City Court rulings annulled the Muslim denomination's 1997 and 2000 conferences, thereby invalidating the leadership selected by each of the conferences. On July 19, 2004, the Sofia City Court appointed Fikri Sali, Ridvan Kadirov, and Osman Osmailov as interim representatives of the Muslim community pending the settlement of some civil court cases related to the leadership dispute. On November 5, 2004, the Sofia Appellate Court overruled the appointment of the triumvirate, stating that the Muslim community's leadership could be appointed only on its own initiative and not by the Sofia City Court. In January 2005, the Supreme Court of Cassation upheld the ruling; the Supreme Court's ruling combined with the March ruling of the Sofia City Court effectively restored the pre-1997 Supreme Islamic Council, headed by Nedim Gendzhev, as the legal representative of the Muslims in the country.

However, following the Supreme Court's January 2005 ruling, the Supreme Cassation Prosecution confiscated the case files, which prevented the files from being transferred to the Sofia City Court and thereby delayed Gendzhev's registration of the new leadership. In May 2005, the Prosecution turned the case files over to the Sofia City Court for 24 hours, allowing the Sofia City Court to pass the five rulings affecting the leadership dispute. Gendzhev immediately appealed the registration of Mustafa Alish Hadji, and the appeal was pending the Prosecution's release of the case files.

On November 5, the Pazarjik District Court passed a 3-year suspended sentence on Ahmed Ahmed Musa for preaching radical Islam and instigating societal hatred along religious lines. He was also fined for disgracing the national flag. During the trial, Musa made a full confession and pleaded guilty to the charges brought against him. Five doctors confirmed that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and as such was extremely susceptible to outside influence. Musa chose not to appeal the sentence.

The 2002 Confessions Act designates the Metropolitan of Sofia, currently Patriarch Maxim, as the Patriarch of the BOC. The law prohibits any group or person who has broken off from a registered religious group from using the same name or claiming any properties belonging to that group.

After a period of virtual obscurity, the BOC's 12-year schism recaptured attention when prosecutors and police intervened, taking the side of Patriarch Maxim and his Holy Synod. In a nationwide operation on the night of July 20–21, 2004, priests from the Alternative Synod, which opposed Patriarch Maxim's leadership, were forcibly evicted from approximately 250 churches and other properties, which the Holy Synod claimed they were illegally occupying. The operation resulted in several clerics being temporarily detained and police closing and securing the properties before returning them to the Holy Synod, which subsequently reopened them. Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) reported police beatings of clergy and lay people.

In the immediate aftermath of the operation, clerics from the Alternative Synod held religious services outside of the churches from which they had been evicted, and core supporters of the Alternative Synod continued to operate a make-shift church in the center of Sofia. A number of the synod's supporters also staged protests against what they viewed as illegal state intervention in an internal church dispute. However, by the time Patriarch Maxim celebrated his ninetieth birthday in October 2004, most of the activities of the Alternative Synod had ceased, and the schism was declared over.

For most registered religious groups, there were no restrictions on attendance at religious services or on private religious instruction. Two BOC seminaries, a Jewish school, three Islamic schools, the university-level Islamic Higher Institute, a Muslim

cultural center, a multi-denominational Protestant seminary, and university theological faculties operated freely. Bibles, Qur'ans, and other religious materials in the Bulgarian language were imported or printed freely, and religious publications were produced regularly.

An optional religious education course was first introduced in state-run schools in 1997. The curriculum, developed by the Ministry of Education's Commission on Religion, initially focused on Christianity but was expanded in 1999 to cover Islam, as well. The course, taught in Bulgarian, examines the historical, philosophical, and cultural aspects of religion and introduces students to the moral values of different confessions. All officially registered religious confessions can request that their religious beliefs be included in the course's curriculum. According to the Ministry of Education, the course was offered to 13,209 primary and secondary school students in 199 schools during the 2004–05 academic year. While the Ministry provides the course material for free to students, the existing 166 religious education teachers are funded directly from municipal budgets.

The Chief Mufti's office also supports summer Qur'anic education courses.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The law requires religious groups wishing to operate and be recognized as legal entities, as well as those wanting to engage in public activities outside of their places of worship, to formally register with the Sofia City Court; however, official registrations of religious denominations has continued to increase, from 36 in 2003 to 45.

While the state of religious freedom has improved for some nontraditional groups, some groups continued to face limited discrimination and antipathy from some local authorities, despite successfully registering through the Sofia City Court. Article 21 of the 2002 Confessions Act states that nationally registered religions may have local branches according to their statute; however, the law does not require formal local registration of denominations, although some municipalities have claimed that it does.

In January 2005, despite previous hostility in Burgas toward non-traditional groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the confession's local branch was listed in the mayor's list of local religious groups. Also in January 2005, the Jehovah's Witnesses completed construction of a new place of worship in Burgas; however, the denomination reported that the building had been subjected to acts of vandalism and hooliganism.

Although some municipalities, such as Rousse, Shumen, Pleven, Stara Zagora, Plovdiv, Blagoevgrad, and Kurdjali, still had local ordinances that curtailed religious practices and had not been changed to conform to the 2002 Confessions Act, it did not appear that these ordinances were strictly enforced. In March 2005, the Burgas Municipal Council adopted a new ordinance repealing previous limitations on the right of non-traditional religious groups to publicly practice their beliefs.

A number of religious groups recognized that foreign missionaries and religious leaders experienced difficulties in obtaining and renewing residence visas in the country because the Law on Foreign Persons has no visa category that explicitly applies to missionaries or religious workers. The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the Government twice refused residence visas to two missionaries from Germany, even though the denomination had received approval for their activities and stay in the country from the Religious Confessions Directorate. Some missionaries have resorted to staying in the country as "tourists," forcing them to limit the length of their visits to no more than 30 days every 6 months.

There were no indications that the Government discriminated against members of any religious group in making restitution to previous owners of properties that were nationalized during the Communist period. However, the BOC, the Catholic Church, the Muslim community, the Jewish community, and several Protestant denominations all claimed that a number of their properties confiscated under the Communist government were not returned. For example, the Catholic Church reported that only 60 percent of its confiscated properties had been restituted; in addition to its many outstanding restitution claims, the Jewish community was still involved in a long legal battle over a high-value property in central Sofia. A central problem facing claimants is the need to demonstrate that the organization seeking restitution is the organization—or the legitimate successor of the organization—that owned the property prior to 1944. This is difficult because Communist hostility to religion led some groups to hide assets or ownership, and because documents have been destroyed or lost over the years.

In 2002, Stefan Kamberov, a 66-year-old priest associated with the Alternative Synod, was killed near the St. Panteleimon Monastery near Dobrinshte. The investigation exceeded the statutory limitations by a year, after which two suspects were

arrested and released on bail of approximately \$1,330 each. The case was scheduled to be heard by the Blagoevgrad District Court in July 2005.

The Constitution prohibits the formation of political parties along religious lines. There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

The Constitution prohibits 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite initial fears that the 2002 Confessions Act would hamper religious organizations' ability to operate freely, 31 new religious groups have registered with the Sofia City Court since 2003.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance, particularly in the media, of some religious groups remained an intermittent problem. While human rights groups reported that societal discrimination against non-traditional religious groups has continued to gradually lessen in recent years, it was not uncommon for the media to disseminate negative and derogatory stories about nontraditional denominations. For example, the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses both reported numerous print and broadcast media stories with negative, derogatory, and sometimes slanderous information about their activities and beliefs.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy regularly monitors religious freedom in ongoing contacts with government officials, Members of Parliament (MPs), clergy and lay leaders of religious communities, and NGOs. Embassy officers met with Orthodox leaders and clergy, senior Muslim leaders, religious and lay leaders of the Jewish community, senior Catholic leaders, and leaders of numerous Protestant and non-traditional denominations. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy remained closely engaged with government officials, MPs, religious organizations, and NGOs concerning the 2002 Confessions Act, government interference in the BOC schism, and reports of discrimination against religious organizations; with various religious groups and government entities regarding the restitution of properties; and with Muslim leaders regarding Islamic extremism and the Muslim leadership dispute.

CROATIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church enjoys a close relationship with the State not shared by other religious groups. The legal position of most major religious communities has improved due to agreements with the State, which grant benefits similar to those enjoyed by the Catholic Church.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and the coalition Government that took power in 2003 has continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Religion and ethnicity are linked closely in society. Since independence in 1991, religious institutions of all faiths were victimized by the ethnic conflicts that led to the breakup of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. There were sporadic reports of intimidation and vandalism, particularly in the war-affected areas, directed against Serbian Orthodox clergy and property, although there was a decrease in severity and frequency of such attacks.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials frequently met with representatives of religious and ethnic minority communities and with government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 21,831 square miles, and its population is approximately 4,437,000. The religious breakdown of the country is approximately: Roman Catholic, 85 percent; Orthodox Christian, 6 percent; Muslim, 1 percent; Jewish, less than 1 percent; other, 4 percent; and atheist, 2 percent. The statistics correlate closely with the country's ethnic makeup. The Orthodox, predominantly ethnic Serbs associated with the Serbian Orthodox Church, primarily live in cities and border areas with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro. Members of other minority religions reside mostly in urban areas. Most immigrants are Roman Catholic ethnic Croats.

Protestants from a number of denominations and foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize, as do representatives of Asian religions. A variety of missionaries are present, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Greek Catholics, Pentecostals, Hare Krishnas, and a wide range of evangelical Protestant Christians (including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Church of Christ, and various nondenominational organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, Islamic community, and other smaller Christian denominations that have signed agreements with the State, receive some state support.

The Law on Legal Status of Religious Communities broadly defines religious communities' legal positions and covers such issues as government funding, tax benefits, and religious education in schools. Other important issues, such as pensions for clergy, religious service in the military, penitentiaries and police, and recognition of religious marriages, were left to each religious community to negotiate separately with the Government. Most religious communities considered the law an improvement over the previous state of affairs. Restitution of nationalized or confiscated church property is regulated under the Law on Return of Property Expropriated or Nationalized during the Yugoslav Communist Rule, which was amended in 2002.

In 2003, the Government approved a regulation on the registration of religious communities, known as the "Regulation on Forms and Maintaining Records of Religious Communities in Croatia," which required all religious communities to submit registration applications within six months. The new regulation stipulates that to register, a religious community must have at least 500 believers and must be registered as an association for five years. All religious communities in the country prior to passage of the law are being registered without conditions; religious communities that are new to the country since passage of the law will need to fulfill the requirements for the minimum number of believers and time registered as an association. By mid 2003, approximately 40 religious communities had been registered. Registered religious communities are granted the status of a "legal person" and enjoy tax and other benefits under the Law on Religious Communities. Religious communities that are based abroad need to submit written permission for registration from their country of origin. The Helsinki Commission reported on conditions to register new religious communities, but prominent human rights organizations including the Croatian Helsinki Committee considered the requirements well within OSCE standards and granting them "privileges that were more than sufficient." No specific licensing is required for foreign missionaries.

In line with the Concordats signed with the Catholic Church and in an effort to define their rights and privileges within a legal framework, agreements have been signed with the following religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church and Islamic Community (2002); the Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Pentecostal Church, Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, Christian Adventist Church, Union of Baptist Churches, Church of God, Church of Christ, and the Reformed Movement of Seventh-day Adventists (2003); and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, and Croatian Old Catholic Church (2003).

In addition, in 2003, the Government adopted unilaterally an agreement with the Jewish Community of Zagreb, which refused to sign the agreement because of lack of sufficient progress on property restitution issues. The Government's general approach is to negotiate agreements with individual religious communities based on a common framework rather than set uniform, nondiscriminatory standards and practices. Leaders of non-Roman Catholic religions have expressed general satisfaction with the communication they have with the Government, most notably with the Government Commission on Relations with Religious Communities, chaired by the Minister of Culture.

An agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the state-run Croatian State Radio and Television (HRT) provides regular, extensive coverage of Roman Catholic events (as many as 10 hours per month). Other religious communities receive approximately 10 minutes broadcast time per month or less. The Roman Catholic Church operates one of the country's private national radio stations, Catholic Radio, which is financed by private contributions. There are no restrictions on religious broadcasting. Topics of interest to major non-Roman Catholic religious groups are covered regularly on weekly religious programming on HRT. The Roman Catholic Church on several occasions reacted to its treatment in the media. In April 2004, the Zagreb Auxiliary Bishop Vlado Kocic, who presides over the Bishops' Conference's "Justitia et Pax" Commission, wrote to CNN requesting an apology for comments about the beatified Croatian Cardinal Stepinac, made during the funeral of Pope John-Paul II. CNN had reported that many perceived Stepinac as close to the country's WWII Nazi puppet regime. CNN denied the request, claiming that no explicit accusations against Stepinac were made and that they merely reported about his life. In November 2004, Christian youth associations protested against a satirical cartoon series critical of the Roman Catholic Church that is broadcast by Croatian national television. In May 2005, the Catholic Radio Marija Association collected more than 40,000 signatures requesting that the series be removed, and sent an open letter to the OSCE disagreeing with the organization's view that the program was an expression of civic and media freedoms. The Islamic community's Bairam ceremony, usually attended by high-level government officials, is telecast live annually from the Zagreb Mosque. The Islamic community credits the monthly TV broadcast "Ekumena" for contributing significantly to an atmosphere of greater tolerance.

Missionaries do not operate registered schools, but the Mormon community provides free English lessons, which normally are offered in conjunction with education on the Mormon religion. The Ministry of Education recognizes the diploma conferred by the Muslim community's secondary school in Zagreb.

Muslims have the right to observe their religious holy days. They are granted a paid holiday for one Bairam and have the right to observe the other as well (although they are not paid for the day).

There is no government-sponsored ecumenical activity.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government imposes no formal restrictions on religious groups, and all religious communities are free to conduct public services and to open and run social and charitable institutions.

There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives some state support and other benefits established in concordats between the Government and the Vatican. The concordats and the other agreements with non-Catholic religious communities allow state financing for some salaries and pensions for priests and nuns through government-managed pension and health funds.

The concordats also regulate recognition of marriages, public school catechisms, and military chaplains. The Ministry of Defense employs 15 full-time and 4 part-time Catholic priests and chaplains. After the Government signed an agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church, five Orthodox priests began service in prisons and penitentiaries; the Islamic Community has deployed one imam in the same service. In May 2005, the Government signed a protocol with the Islamic community that guarantees that armed forces' members and recruits of the Muslim faith have regular access to chaplains, are provided with halal meals, and are excused from duty during major holidays.

Marriages conducted by the 15 religious communities that have agreements with the State are officially recognized, eliminating the need to register the marriages in the civil registry office.

Facilitating the return of refugees (primarily ethnic Serbs) is a challenge for the Government, which has made progress in a number of areas relating to returns. However, some ethnic Serbs who wish to return to the country, including Serbian Orthodox clergy, continue to encounter difficulties or delays in reconstructing dam-

aged or destroyed houses. Serbian Orthodox officials report that in the aftermath of the 1991–1995 war, the number of clergy had been reduced to 30 out of the approximately 200 clergy who resided in the country prior to the war. An additional 40 clergy have returned, raising the total to approximately 70 Serbian Orthodox clergy by May 2004. More than a dozen new priests, mostly from Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro, came to the country in the past year and the rising number was partly due to the increase in Serb returnees. Orthodox Church sources complain that the new priests must renew their working permits and residency status at relatively short intervals ranging from every three months to one year and that the lack of a more permanent status deprives them and their family members of health care benefits and pensions. The Church plans to officially request a more favorable application of regulations related to residency status for clergy according to models in the European Union. While religion and ethnicity are closely linked in society, the majority of incidents of discrimination are motivated by ethnicity rather than religion or religious doctrine. A pattern of open discrimination continues against ethnic Serbs, and, at times, other minorities in a number of areas, including the administration of justice, employment, and housing.

The Government requires that religious training be provided in public schools, although attendance is optional. Given that 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, the Catholic catechism is the predominant teaching offered in public schools. Schools that meet the necessary quota of seven students of a minority faith per class permitted separate religion classes to be held for the students. In cases where there are not sufficient numbers of students of a minority faith to warrant separate classes, students may exercise the option to receive religious instruction through their religious community. In 2003, government officials estimated that 4,500 primary and secondary school children in 37 schools attended Serbian Orthodox religion classes, the majority of which are in Eastern Slavonia, Rijeka, and Gorski Kotar. After initial resistance, principals in two schools in Knin in September 2005 permitted Serbian Orthodox religion classes for the approximately 500 primary and secondary school children eligible to attend. Similar resistance by local school boards to establishing Serbian Orthodox religion classes in schools continued in Imotski and Skradin. In the mainly Serb-populated Donji Lapac, the school principal banned the Orthodox clergy from organizing religious classes for some 30 interested children. Serbian Orthodox officials reported that many school children and their parents are reluctant to identify themselves as Serbian Orthodox to avoid being singled out. Similarly, the Orthodox clergy noted that children in the Karlovac area were reluctant to openly attend their religious education, for fear of being ostracized.

There has been almost no textbook or curriculum reform since independence in 1991. Members of the Jewish community have remarked that basic information about Judaism provided to students was inaccurate. In September 2003, the Jewish Community of Zagreb opened the first private Jewish elementary school in the country. In January 2004, the Government recognized Holocaust Remembrance Day with seminars and commemorative events.

The secondary school operated by the Islamic Community for religious training is at full capacity (102 students); the community plans to convert the school gradually into a more general secondary school while at the same time developing an institution of higher education specifically for religious training. In October 2005, it plans to open a Faculty of Islamic Studies at the Zagreb mosque, which will educate both clergy and laity and provide training for religious teachers in the schools. An expected 30 students will enroll in the fall 2005. The Minister of Culture in charge of relations with religious communities has expressed support for the project. Authorities representing the Islamic community continued to report good cooperation and dialogue with the Government. The Roman Catholic Church intends to establish a university in Zagreb and the project is in initial planning stages.

Restitution of property nationalized or confiscated by the Yugoslav Communist regime remains a problem. Many religious communities identify property return as their top priority and complain about the lack of progress. A 1998 concordat with the Vatican provided for the return of all Roman Catholic Church property confiscated by the Communist regime after 1945. The agreement stipulates that the Government would return seized properties or compensate the Church where return is impossible. Some progress was made with some returnable properties being restituted; however, there has been no compensation to date for non-returnable properties. In 2003, the Roman Catholic Church submitted a list of priority properties for restitution to the Government that included large commercial buildings, recreational property, and several properties already in use by the Church, such as monasteries, dormitories, and residences for children with disabilities. Catholic Church officials reported the return of a few properties over the last year. In late

2004, the Church reported the return of a convent building on the island of Losinj and most of the island of Badija belonging to a Franciscan monastery. The Government signed, at the end of the year, a decision to return to the Catholic Church all forest or agricultural land that is not involved in property disputes. Also, the Government completed an exchange contract for a hospital in Osijek that had belonged to the Church. A suitable property for exchange still needs to be identified. A similar exchange process was begun for a property in Rijeka. While in total an estimated 15 percent of all Church properties have been returned, the Church expressed satisfaction with the Government's work on the issue.

Other than the Law on Return of Property Expropriated or Nationalized during Yugoslav Communist Rule, there are no specific property restitution agreements between the Government and non-Roman Catholic religious groups. The Serbian Orthodox community, the second largest claimant of property in the country, reported that its joint restitution sub-commission with the Government had not convened during the year, despite repeated requests. It reported that restitution in 2004 was minimal and that only 10 percent of the claimed property has been returned to date. The only significant restitution was that of the building in Karlovac in July 2004, which houses county offices. Also in Karlovac eparchy, a small plot of forested land was returned to the Gomirje monastery. Two apartments in the center of Zagreb were returned to the community at the end of the year along with one flat each in Zadar and Sibenik. According to Church sources, reconstruction of 25 churches damaged in the war has been halted for which the previous Government completed project documentation. Reconstruction of two smaller religious buildings in Mali Zdeneci and Grubisno Polje were either completed or initiated during the year. The Ministry of Reconstruction set aside funds to tear down and then rebuild the severely damaged Orthodox Church in the center of Karlovac. Overall, sources in the Serbian Orthodox Church consider that the current Government has been slow to follow through on its commitments. During the year the Church took legal action against current owners of 40 previously- church-owned and then nationalized flats in Zagreb, to prevent further sale. Several buildings in downtown Zagreb have not been returned, nor have properties that belonged to monasteries, such as arable land and forests. Serbian Orthodox authorities report that in Pakrac and other war-affected areas of Dalmatia and Eastern Slavonia, there has been almost no property returned; overall they estimate that progress has stalled in the past year.

Several Jewish properties, including some Zagreb buildings, have not been returned. The process of returning nationalized property to the Jewish community in Zagreb is at a near-standstill. There has been no progress on the restitution of the Chevra Kadisha building in Zagreb previously owned by the Jewish community. The Jewish community of Osijek reported some progress on the return of property in Osijek and Vukovar; in 2004, the property on which the former synagogue of Vukovar stood was returned. Other claims remain stalled in court.

The Muslim community has no property claims, but it complained that local authorities in Rijeka have stalled the procedure to approve the detailed environmental plan, the last administrative step before they can build a mosque. A location permit was first issued in 1991, but local opposition to the mosque and bureaucratic and financial obstacles combined over the years to delay the project. Officials within the Islamic community earlier reported a supportive attitude on the part of local authorities. The community is now concerned that local pressure from war veterans associations who have publicly opposed the project will lead to further delays.

Generally, anti-Semitism was not an issue; however in June, a member of the municipal council in Dubrovnik commented on a potential Jewish hotel investor that when "choosing between Serbs and Jews, Jews were still a greater evil." Local authorities and the Government condemned the comments; however, the local branch of the ruling HDZ party took no disciplinary action against the party member. In April 2005, the Jewish community and some international organizations received a threatening, anti-Semitic letter. Police investigated but have identified no suspects.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religion and ethnicity are closely linked in society, and religion often was used historically to identify non-Croats and single them out for discriminatory practices. This link led to the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s and to the perpetration of violence and intimidation against religious persons, institutions, and symbols of all faiths. Such incidents still occur, primarily directed against Serbian Orthodox clergy and property, although there was a decrease in severity and frequency.

During the period covered by this report, both international observers and religious leaders noted that overall ethnic and religious relations improved. However, incidents involving harassment of clergy and desecration and vandalism of Serbian Orthodox Church property continued to occur sporadically. In Dalmatia, Serbian Orthodox officials reported numerous incidents of verbal threats and isolated physical attacks against clergy and property. Serbian Orthodox officials complain that local police seldom take action against alleged perpetrators.

In Slavonia, verbal abuse continued against the Orthodox religion and priests in the Daruvar area, but they were not reported to the police. In May 2005, unknown perpetrators stole cash from an Orthodox church in Daruvar and toppled the stone cross that leaned against the church wall.

An Orthodox chapel was set alight at the cemetery in Osijek in April 2005; police investigated but there were no reports about its findings by the end of the period covered in this report.

Dalmatian hinterlands remained the area with the greatest frequency of reported incidents against both Orthodox Church property and clergy. The St. Pokrov church in Knin was broken into on two occasions, most recently July 2004 and offensive graffiti appeared on its walls. Church sources claimed that the perpetrators are known but that no legal action was taken against them. Windows in the church building in Vrlika were smashed upon the arrival of the new priest in August; the municipality covered the costs of their repair. The church in the village of Dicom was broken into in June and in October 2004, and an old tree by its front door was cut down. Burglary attempts occurred in October at the church in Ubli and at the parish priest's home in Imotski. The police regularly investigated but never identified the perpetrators.

In July 2004, Orthodox parish priests in Sibenik and Zadar were harassed in the city streets and complained of insufficient police response. In August 2005, unidentified perpetrators overturned five tombstones at an Orthodox cemetery in Podum. In September 2005, a fascist Ustasha symbol was sprayed on the new door to the church in Kistanje. Police identified no suspects. In Knin, individuals on several occasions, including in September 2004, shouted phrases such as "Kill the Serb" at the Orthodox clergy outside the church of St. Pokrov, but police reportedly declined to take action.

In December 2004, a group of football fans entered the Orthodox bishop's courtyard in Sibenik shouting abuse. The police questioned the bishop but there was no action against the individuals.

The Muslim and Jewish communities have reported no major incidents of violence or harassment toward religious persons or sites during the period covered by this report. However, in June 2004, a Muslim flag was burned at the entrance to the Muslim cemetery in Osijek. In July 2004, unknown perpetrators desecrated 24 tombs at the same cemetery, setting fire to wreaths on the grave of the recently deceased wife of the local imam, and spraying swastikas and fascist messages on 24 graves. Police investigated; preliminary indications were that a group of local youths was behind the incident.

Relations between the Government and the Jewish community have steadily improved over the past several years. In 2003, Israeli President Moshe Katsav visited the country for 3 days on an official visit. In January 2005, President Stjepan Mesic visited Israel. In March 2005, the President visited Yad Vashem memorial. In April 2005, several high-level officials, including Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, attended a commemoration ceremony at the Jasenovac concentration camp. The event was also attended by leaders of ethnic and religious minority communities. Preparations were under way to open an educational center by the end of the year at the Jasenovac Memorial Area for which the Government approved funding in May. The Memorial Center in March hosted a group of 60 Croatian history students, as part of their preparation for future teaching jobs. As with other smaller religious communities, the primary issue for the Jewish community is the return of property either confiscated or nationalized by the Communist regime of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, of which the restitution of even a part would significantly affect the community's financial well-being.

While the Roman Catholic Church officially seeks no role in political life, conservative elements within the Catholic hierarchy have expressed dissatisfaction with government policies on war legacy issues, including cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY), and concern for citizens indicted for war crimes. Popular priest Zlatko Sudac attracted attention in March when he publicly invited Croatian general Ante Gotovina—indicted for war crimes by the ICTY—not to surrender to the Tribunal. The Croatian Bishop's Conference promptly responded that his statement was not an official position of the Church.

On Easter, Cardinal Josip Bozanic delivered a notable sermon discussing the country's integration into the European Union and cooperation with ICTY, calling on Croatians to examine themselves rather than blame international institutions for their problems. He also called on citizens to respect and utilize international institutions and the legal system to further the country's cause, rather than denigrate them. In May, the Bishops' Conference invited PM Sanader to speak to the group about EU integration and the role of the Church.

According to the results of a survey published in May by the international research agency GFK Marketing Research Center, citizens place the most trust in the Catholic Church, the Croatian President, and persons close to them, as opposed to the government, judiciary and political parties, which occupy the opposite end of the scale. According to the same survey, the high level of trust has remained unchanged for over the past five years.

The Catholic Church exercised considerable influence over the Government's social policies. For example, in January 2005 and in spring 2004 the church publicly criticized the international Global Fund's MEMOAIDS educational program, designed to raise AIDS awareness in secondary schools. The three-year program was approved by the Ministry of Health in 2003 and supported by the Education Ministry. The Church objected to the mention of the use of condoms in the program, stating that it encouraged promiscuity. After the criticism, which coincided with the change in government, the relevant ministries failed to make timely statements in support of the program, which seriously decreased the interest of schools in its application. In late 2003 Caritas, the largest Catholic Church charity in the country, campaigned for legislation based on the church/state concordats that would ban most retail stores from opening on Sundays. A law restricting business activities on Sundays was enacted in January 2004; however, the Constitutional Court overturned the law in April 2004 after major retailers appealed the law citing financial losses.

Since Cardinal Bozanic took office as Archbishop of Zagreb in 1997 and became head of the Bishop's Conference, the Catholic Church leadership has sought a more proactive role in advocating reconciliation. Ecumenical efforts among the religious communities have developed in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. For example, religious leaders meet frequently to discuss issues of mutual interest and to cooperate and coordinate with the Government Commission for Relations with Religious Communities. In late 2004, the three largest religions jointly declared their opposition to legalized abortion.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom and actively works to encourage the Government to respect religious freedom in practice. U.S. Embassy officials met frequently at all levels with representatives of religious communities and minority groups and engaged in the promotion of human rights, including the religious rights of these groups.

The Embassy played a leading role among diplomatic missions on issues of ethnic and religious reconciliation, and human rights. For example, on several occasions the Embassy advocated formally and informally for the granting of citizenship to ethnic Bosniaks—largely members of the Muslim faith—who were denied citizenship for more than a decade. This advocacy took place over several years and consisted of formal meetings with Ministry of Interior and local authorities, frequent visits to the community, as well as direct financial support through the Embassy to the Muslim community for organizing their legal effort. In May 2005, the Croatian Government granted citizenship to members of the community.

The U.S. Government has supported several programs to promote religious freedom and tolerance. In 2004, the Embassy supported the construction of an inter-ethnic, inter-religious seniors' home in an ethnically-mixed community near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Embassy organized the visit of a U.S. university lecturer to speak about contemporary trends in Islamic understanding, Islamic thought, and Muslims in the U.S., and to encourage interfaith tolerance. The Embassy also was involved in the selection and support of two high school history

teachers to participate in a seminar on Holocaust teacher training hosted by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and other museums and study centers.

During the period covered by this report, Phase II of the International Partnership among Museums (IPAM) was implemented between USHMM and the Jasenovac Memorial Area. (IPAM is a State Department-administered international museum exchange program in collaboration with the American Association of Museums). The partnership's previous work in Phase I concentrated on technical expertise exchange, such as preserving and managing collections, developing a joint web site, and conducting research. Phase II concentrated on efforts to educate the Croatian public about the Holocaust and the history of the Jasenovac concentration camp. Activities consisted primarily of personnel and expertise exchanges, both in person and electronically. The U.S. is supporting the development of a Holocaust Education Center at Jasenovac Memorial, through the expertise of the USHMM. The education center will provide workshops for student tour groups.

In January 2005, the USHMM participated in a Ministry of Education seminar for history teachers on learning and teaching the Holocaust. In addition, the Embassy is funding the translation and printing of a USHMM handbook on teaching about the Holocaust. The project commenced in 2004 and will be completed in 2005, when the handbooks will be distributed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and with the Jasenovac memorial area.

CYPRUS

The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus 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 reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in Cypriot society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a few reports of vandalism of religious sites and cemeteries.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Cyprus has an area of 5,747 square miles, and the population in the government-controlled areas is estimated at 749,200.

Prior to 1974, the country experienced a long period of strife between its Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. In response, the U.N. Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) began peacekeeping operations in 1964. The island has been divided since the Turkish military intervention of 1974, following a coup d'etat directed from Greece. The southern part of the island is under the control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, while the northern part is governed by a Turkish Cypriot administration. In 1983, that administration proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC), although it is not recognized by the United States or any other country except Turkey. A buffer zone patrolled by the UNFICYP separates the two parts. In 2003, Turkish Cypriot authorities relaxed many restrictions on movement between the two communities, including abolishing all crossing fees. The new procedures led to relatively unimpeded contact between the communities and permitted Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to visit religious sites located in the other community; however, Cypriots must show identification at the buffer zone checkpoints to cross from one side to the other.

Approximately 96 percent of the population in the government-controlled areas is Greek Orthodox. An estimated 0.7 percent of the remaining population is Maronite, slightly less than 0.4 percent is Armenian Orthodox, 0.1 percent is Latin (Roman Catholic), and 3.2 percent belong to other groups. The latter category includes small groups of Protestants and foreigners of various religious beliefs.

A 1998 opinion poll indicated that about 48 percent of Greek Cypriots regularly attended church services, while 49 percent attended only for major religious holidays and ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. The remainder did not attend religious services at all.

There is some western Protestant missionary activity in the government-controlled area.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Turkish Cypriots residing in the south and Greek Cypriots living in the north are allowed to practice their religions freely. The 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus specifies that the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, which is not under the authority of the mainland Greek Orthodox Church, has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with its holy canons and charter. The Greek Orthodox Church is exempt from taxes with regard to religious activity. According to law, the Church is required to pay taxes only on strictly commercial activities.

Three other religious groups are recognized in the Constitution: Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Christians, and Latins (Roman Catholics). These groups also are exempt from taxes and are eligible, along with the Greek Orthodox Church, for government subsidies to their religious institutions.

The Government of Cyprus has constitutional or legal bars against religious discrimination. The basic agreement covering treatment of Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the north and Turkish Cypriots living in the south remains the 1975 Vienna III Agreement. Among other things, this agreement provides for facilities for religious worship.

Religions other than the five recognized religions are not required to register with the authorities; however, if they desire to engage in financial transactions, such as maintaining a bank account, they must register as a nonprofit company. To register, a group must submit an application through an attorney that states the purpose of the nonprofit organization and provides the names of the organization's directors. Upon approval, nonprofit organizations are tax-exempt and are required to provide annual reports of their activities. Registration is granted promptly, and many religious groups are recognized. No religious groups were denied registration during the reporting period.

There are no prohibitions against missionary activity or proselytizing in the government-controlled areas. Foreign missionaries must obtain and periodically renew residence permits in order to live in the country; normally, renewal requests are not denied.

The Government requires children in public primary and secondary schools to take instruction in the Greek Orthodox religion. Parents of other religions may request that their children be excused. These children are exempted from attending religious services and instruction. In the past, some Jehovah's Witnesses parents have reported that their children were not excused from all religious instruction. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from active military duty; however, they are legally required to complete an alternative military service and perform reservist duty in the Greek Cypriot National Guard. Legal proceedings were initiated in 2002 against several members of Jehovah's Witnesses for failure to appear for reserve duty. Their cases were suspended in November 2002 pending a revision of the law; the cases were unresolved at the end of the reporting period.

The Government of Cyprus recognizes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Epiphany, Annunciation, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Holy Spirit Day, Assumption Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 2001, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Government of Turkey was responsible for imposing restrictions on Greek Cypriots.

Since 2003 when restrictions of movement were relaxed, Greek Cypriots have reported relatively easy access to Apostolos Andreas monastery and other religious sites in the north. Likewise, Turkish Cypriots enjoyed relatively easy visits to religious sites, including Hala Sultan Tekke in the government-controlled area.

Missionaries have the legal right to proselytize, but the Government closely monitors missionary activity. It is illegal for a missionary to use "physical or moral compulsion" to make religious conversions. The police may investigate missionary activity based on a citizen's complaint. They may also open an investigation if missionaries are suspected of being involved in illegal activities that threaten the security of the republic, constitutional or public order, or public health and morals. There are occasional apprehensions but there have been no arrests under these laws.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are polite relations between the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus and the other religious communities in the south. Greek Cypriots report that unused Orthodox churches and cemeteries in the north continued to be robbed and vandalized, and the Government maintained its claim that Orthodox icons had been smuggled out of the north. In April, a Turkish Cypriot cemetery in Larnaca, which had recently been rehabilitated as part of a U.S.-funded project aimed at improving bicomunal relations, was vandalized.

The Orthodox Church is suspicious of any attempts to proselytize among Greek Cypriots and closely monitors such activities. Religion is a prominent component of Greek Cypriot society, with considerable long-standing cultural and political influence. During the 1950's, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios III, led the Greek Cypriot campaign for independence and served as president from independence in 1960 until his death in 1977. While the pre-eminent position of the Church has been somewhat reduced in recent years, it remains an important power center in politics. Present day influence of the Church can be seen in the political messages bishops and priests regularly include in their Sunday sermons. In February, an organization known as the Pancyprian Christian Orthodox Movement, with links to the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, issued a booklet alleging that clubs such as the Lions, Rotary and Boy Scouts were "recruiting grounds for Freemasonry," and thus a danger to Cypriot society.

In March, the Government requested that an additional Cypriot Orthodox priest be assigned to minister to the Greek Cypriots living in the Karpas region of the north. The enclaved community already has one full-time priest but decided it needed a second. Turkish Cypriot authorities agreed in principle to this request, but they objected to the individual who was proposed, claiming he disliked Turkish Cypriots and had made inappropriate statements about their community. Turkish Cypriot authorities asked that the Government nominate a different priest. At the end of the reporting period, a decision was still pending on this issue.

As the largest owner of real estate in the south and the operator of several large business enterprises, the Greek Orthodox Church is a significant economic factor.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities in the context of its overall dialogue and policy to promote human rights.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officers meet periodically with Greek Cypriot religious authorities regarding specific religious freedom concerns.

AREAS ADMINISTERED BY TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Since 1974, the northern part of Cyprus has been governed by a Turkish Cypriot administration that proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") in 1983. The "TRNC" is not recognized by the United States or any other country except Turkey.

The basic law governing the Turkish Cypriot community refers specifically to a "secular republic" and provides for freedom of religion, and the Turkish Cypriot authorities generally respect this right in practice. The politically divisive environment of Cyprus, however, occasionally affected religious freedom.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a few reports of vandalism of religious sites and cemeteries.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Approximately 220,000 persons live in the areas administered by Turkish Cypriots. An estimated 99 percent of the Turkish Cypriot population is at least nominally Muslim. There is a small Turkish Cypriot Baha'i community. Most other non-Muslims in the north are foreigners from Western Europe who are generally members of the Roman Catholic or Anglican churches. Approximately 10 percent of the population in the north attends religious services regularly.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The basic law in the Turkish Cypriot community provides for freedom of religion, and the authorities generally respect this right in practice.

Turkish Cypriots residing in the south and Greek Cypriots living in the north are allowed to practice their religions freely. The Constitution states the Vakf or Evkaf, the Muslim institution that regulates religious activity for Turkish Cypriots, has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with Vakf laws and principles. No legislative, executive, or other act can contravene or interfere with the Orthodox Church or the Vakf. According to regulations, they are required to pay taxes only on strictly commercial activities.

The Turkish Cypriot administration bars religious discrimination. The basic agreement covering treatment of Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the north and Turkish Cypriots living in the south remains the 1975 Vienna III Agreement. Among other things, this agreement provides for facilities for religious worship.

Turkish Cypriot basic law refers specifically to a "secular republic," and provides for religious freedom; no specific religion is recognized in the basic law. Provisions in the 1960 Constitution make the Vakf tax-exempt in its religious activities, which include covering the cost of Muslim religious activities and the salaries of Muslim religious leaders. The Vakf also receives official subsidies. Commercial and real estate operations of the Vakf, however, are subject to the applicable taxes. No other religious organization is tax-exempt or receives subsidies. The Vakf is the largest landowner in the north.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the Turkish Cypriot authorities unless they wish to engage in commercial activity or apply for tax-exempt status. There are no legal restrictions on missionary activity; however, such activity is rare.

There is instruction in religion, ethics, and comparative religions in two grades of the primary school system in the Turkish Cypriot community. There is no formal Islamic religious instruction in public schools, and there are no state-supported religious schools.

The Turkish Cypriot authorities do not sponsor any interfaith activity.

The following religious holidays are observed widely in the Turkish Cypriot community: Kurban Bairam, Birth of the Prophet Muhammed, and Ramadan Bairam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Greek Cypriots and Maronites were prohibited from visiting religious sites located in military zones in the Turkish Cypriot community.

Turkish Cypriot authorities gave permission for an Orthodox service to be held in Agias Mamas Church near the town of Guzelyurt/Morphou on September 1 and 2, 2004. On August 27, a bomb exploded in the doorway of the church. No one was hurt in the incident. Although no one claimed responsibility, it was widely believed that Turkish Cypriot nationalists planned the attack to disrupt the Greek Cypriot religious ceremony. In the end, the church was repaired and the ceremony took place as planned. This was the first time in 30 years that Greek Cypriots had been able to hold services in the church; however, Turkish Cypriot authorities did not allow the Greek Cypriot organizers to ring the church bell as part of the ceremony.

In the Turkish Cypriot community, 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In the north there are few non-Muslims, but there is no friction between them and the nominally Muslim population. Greek Cypriots report that unused Orthodox churches and cemeteries in the north continued to be robbed and vandalized, and the Government maintained its claim that Orthodox icons had been smuggled out of the north. Although Turkish Cypriots occasionally have reported that unused mosques in the south also have been vandalized, the Government of Cyprus routinely maintains and repairs them. In February, a Greek Cypriot cemetery near Lapta/Lapithos, which had recently been rehabilitated as part of a U.S.-funded project aimed at improving bicomunal relations, was vandalized.

In May 2005, Turkish Cypriot media alleged that a Greek Cypriot church committee had smuggled a religious icon across the buffer zone (or green line) into the south. There were also reports of Turkish Cypriot cemeteries in the south being destroyed for the construction of roads and other development.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities in the context of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officers meet periodically with Turkish Cypriot religious authorities regarding specific religious freedom concerns.

CZECH REPUBLIC

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 30,442 square miles, and its population is estimated at 10.2 million. The country has a largely homogenous population with a dominant Christian tradition. However, in part as a result of 40 years of Communist rule between 1948 and 1989, the vast majority of citizens do not identify themselves as members of any organized religion. In a 2004 opinion poll, 32 percent of respondents claimed to believe in God, while 49 percent identified themselves as atheists. There was a revival of interest in religion after the 1989 "Velvet Revolution"; however, the number of those professing religious beliefs or participating in organized religion has fallen steadily since then in almost every region of the country.

An estimated 5 percent of the population attends Catholic services weekly. Most live in the southern Moravian dioceses of Olomouc and Brno. The number of practicing Protestants is even lower (approximately 1 percent of the population). Leaders of the local Muslim community estimate that there are 20,000 to 30,000 Muslims; Islam was registered as an officially recognized religion in 2004. There is a mosque in Brno and another in Prague. The Jewish community, which numbers only a few thousand persons, is an officially registered religion because of its recognition by the State before 1989.

Missionaries of various religious groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses, are present in the country. Missionaries of various religions generally proselytize without hindrance.

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.

Religious affairs are the responsibility of the Department of Churches at the Ministry of Culture. All religious groups officially registered with the Ministry of Cul-

ture are eligible to receive subsidies from the State, although some decline to receive state financial support as a matter of principle and as an expression of their independence. There are 26 state-recognized religious organizations. In 2004, the Center of Muslim Communities was officially registered, the first such registration for a Muslim organization in the country. The Jewish Center Chai, which applied for registration last year, was denied because its application did not meet the appropriate legal conditions. The Center did not have the requisite number of signatures, and it came to light that some signatures were falsely placed on the document. The citizens involved are considering legal action against the Center. An appeal by the Unification Church to overturn their denial to register in 1999 was denied by the Constitutional Court in 2004.

The 2002 law on "Religious Freedom and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations" created a two-tiered system of registration for religious organizations. To register at the first (lowest) tier, a religious group must have at least 300 adult members permanently residing in the country. First-tier registration conveys limited tax benefits and imposes annual reporting requirements, as well as a 10-year waiting period before the organization may apply for full second-tier registration. To register at the second tier, a religious group must have membership equal to at least 0.1 percent of the country's population (approximately 10,000 persons) and have been registered in the first tier for at least 10 years. Second-tier registration entitles the organization to a share of state funding. Only clergy of registered second-tier organizations may perform officially recognized marriage ceremonies and serve as chaplains in the military and prisons, although prisoners of other faiths may receive visits from their respective clergy. Religious groups registered prior to 1989, such as the small Jewish community, are not required to meet these conditions for registration. Unregistered religious groups may not legally own community property but often form civic-interest associations for the purpose of managing their property and other holdings until they are able to meet the qualifications for registration. The Government does not interfere with or prevent this type of interim solution. Unregistered religious groups otherwise are free to assemble and worship in the manner of their choice.

Religious organizations receive approximately \$117 million (3 billion Czech crowns) annually from the Government. Funds are divided proportionally among the 21 religious organizations eligible for state assistance based on the number of clergy in each, with the exception of 4 religious organizations (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the New Apostolic Church, and Open Brethren) that do not accept state funding. Of this sum, approximately \$32 million (818 million Czech crowns) is used to pay salaries to clergymen. The rest of the funding goes to state grants for religious organizations' medical, charitable, and educational activities, as well as for the maintenance of religious memorials and buildings.

A 2000 law outlaws Holocaust denial and provides for prison sentences of 6 months to 3 years for public denial, questioning, or approval of, or attempts to justify the Nazi genocide. The law also outlaws the incitement of hatred based on religion.

Missionaries must obtain a long-term residence and work permit if they intend to remain longer than 90 days. There were no reports of delays in processing visas for missionaries during the period covered by this report. There is no special visa category for religious workers; foreign missionaries and clergy are required to meet the relatively stringent conditions for a standard work permit even if their activity is strictly ecclesiastical or voluntary in nature.

Religion is not taught in public schools, although a few private religious schools exist. Religious broadcasters are free to operate without hindrance from the Government or other parties.

The Government continued its effort to resolve religious-based communal and personal property restitution problems, especially with regard to Jewish property. Jewish claims date to the period of the Nazi occupation, while Catholic authorities are pressing claims for properties that were seized under the former Communist regime. While Jewish property claims have been largely resolved, there was no progress in resolving the Catholic Church's claims during the period covered by this report.

The 1991 Law on Restitution applied only to property seized after the Communists took power in 1948. In 1994, the Parliament amended the law to provide for restitution of or compensation for property wrongfully seized between 1938 and 1945. This amendment provided for the inclusion of Jewish private properties, primarily buildings, seized by the Nazi regime. In 1994, the Federation of Jewish Communities identified 202 communal properties as its highest priorities for restitution, although it had unresolved claims for more than 1,000 properties. By decree, the Government returned most of the properties in its possession, as did the city of Prague; however, despite a government appeal, other cities have not been as respon-

sive. A few outstanding cases remain, including two properties in Brno that are under the control of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. A 2000 law authorized the Government to return more than 60 works of art in the National Gallery to the Jewish community and an estimated 7,000 works of art in the Government's possession to individual Jewish citizens and their descendants. Another provision of the law authorized the return of certain agricultural property in the Government's possession to its original owners.

A government compensation fund of approximately \$11.7 million (300 million Czech crowns) created to pay for those properties that cannot be restituted physically began operating in 2001 under the control of an independent board. It is expected to provide partial compensation in cases where the Government needs to retain the property or is no longer in possession of it, to help meet the social needs of poor Jewish communities, and to support the restoration of synagogues and cemeteries. Approximately two-thirds of the funds are to be dedicated to communal property and one-third to individual claims. Applications for the fund were accepted in 2001.

Certain properties of religious orders, including 175 monasteries and other institutions, were restituted under laws passed in 1990 and 1991. The Catholic Church still claims some 175,000 hectares of "income-generating properties." Many of these properties are vast tracts of farm and woodland that are now in the hands of municipal governments or private owners. These current owners claim that the Catholic Church was granted the use of the properties under the Hapsburg empire but that the Church was never the owner of the properties in question and that the Government owes the Church no duty of restitution. When the Social Democratic government came to power in 1998, it halted further restitution of non-Jewish religious communal property, including a decision of the previous government to return 1,068,000 hectares of land and some 700 buildings to the Catholic Church. Efforts to resolve the final claims continue but have been slowed by the Church's refusal to provide a list of specific properties and land to which it feels entitled, and the Government's refusal to continue restitution discussions without this list. There was no progress in resolving the Catholic Church's claims during the period covered by this report.

Members of unregistered religious groups may issue publications without interference.

The Ministry of Culture sponsors religiously oriented cultural activities through a grant program. The Ministry sponsored some inter-faith activities during the period covered by this report, including partial funding of the Christian and Jewish Society.

Easter Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day (December 26) are recognized as national holidays, although their recognition does not negatively affect any religious group.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Under the 2002 religious registration law, the Ministry of Culture has responsibility for registering religious charities and enterprises as legal entities. The Catholic Church has criticized the law on the grounds that it unduly restricts the manner in which the Church manages and finances many of its social projects. An October 2003 Constitutional Court ruling that the Ministry of Culture improperly interpreted the registration law in failing to register a religious enterprise operated by the Catholic Church in the northern Moravian town of Lipnik nad Bécvou was implemented by the Ministry in 2003 and the enterprise in question was registered. The Catholic Church reported that religious charities and enterprises continue to experience difficulties and delays in registering as legal entities, although there has been some recent improvement in the speed of granting registrations.

Several unregistered religious groups, including the Church of Scientology, have criticized the 2002 law on registration of religious groups because they believe that it is prejudicial against smaller religious groups.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reports of abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2002, the Parliament passed a measure to extend the deadline for filing art restitution claims by Holocaust victims to December 31, 2006. In February 2004, Parliament approved a law designating January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day in the country.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The immigrant population is still relatively small and includes persons from Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Greece. Immigrants have not reported any difficulties in practicing their respective faiths.

Plans to build a mosque in the northern Bohemian town of Teplice were withdrawn in 2004 because of protests from the town's residents. A petition against the mosque, noting recent incidents of Arab terrorism, garnered 4,500 signatures from a population of 53,000. Teplice is popular among Arab tourists for its medicinal spas; in 2003, the town had approximately 2,850 visitors from Arab countries.

A small but persistent and fairly well-organized extreme right-wing movement with anti-Semitic views exists in the country. The Ministry of Interior continued its efforts to counter the neo-Nazis, which included monitoring of their activities, close cooperation with police units in neighboring countries, and concentrated efforts to shut down unauthorized concerts and gatherings of neo-Nazi groups. In August 2004, approximately 80 tombstones were found toppled by unknown vandals at a Jewish cemetery in the eastern town of Hranice. In October 2004, vandals damaged a memorial to victims of the Holocaust for the second time since it was erected three months earlier in the town of Bohumin. In April 2005, Denis Gerasimov, member of the Russian Neo-Nazi band Kolovkrat, was acquitted of charges of promotion of Nazism and Neo-Nazism by the Prague Sixth District Court. Police had arrested Gerasimov and charged him with supporting and propagating a movement aimed at suppressing human rights. Gerasimov was detained at Prague's Ruzyně International Airport after police found large amounts of Nazi propaganda in his luggage. Gerasimov's band performed at a skinhead meeting in east Bohemia in January 2004. In March 2005, several hundred Neo-Nazis from the country and neighboring countries staged a concert in a Czech town; the concert led to calls for a police crackdown, but police stated that they could not intervene as it was a private event where no breach of the law was committed. In 2000, Michal Zitko was arrested on charges of slandering a race, nation, or belief for publishing an edition of Hitler's book "Mein Kampf." In January 2004, the Prague Municipal Court re-imposed a previously overturned 3-year sentence on Michal Zitko for supporting a movement aimed at suppressing human rights, but in March 2005, Zitko was acquitted by the Supreme Court. The Court did not find that by publishing the book Zitko was "supporting a movement" aimed at suppressing human rights.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Government efforts on religious issues have focused largely on encouraging the Government and religious groups to resolve religious property restitution claims and registration of religious organizations.

During the period covered by this report, U.S. Government and Embassy officials emphasized to the Government and religious groups the importance of restitution (or fair and adequate compensation when return is no longer possible) in cases pending from property wrongfully taken from Holocaust victims, the Jewish community, and churches.

The Embassy maintains close contact with the Office of the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, representatives of various religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations. Embassy officials met on several occasions with representatives of the Ministry of Culture to discuss the law on religious registration, as well as representatives of smaller religious groups affected by the law, including the Czech Muslim community. Several meetings were held with representatives from the Ministry of Culture, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Federation of Jewish Communities on restitution issues. Embassy officials also responded to individual requests for assistance from Czech-American Holocaust victims seeking compensation.

DENMARK

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church and enjoys some privileges not available to other faiths.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 16,639 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.4 million. As of January 2005, 83.2 percent of the population belonged to the official Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although only approximately 3 percent of church members attend services regularly, most members utilize the church for weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, and religious holidays.

The second largest religious community is Muslim, constituting approximately 3.5 percent of the population (180,000 persons), followed by communities of Catholics (35,000), Jehovah's Witnesses (15,000), Jews (7,000), Baptists (5,500), Pentecostals (5,000), and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4,500). There are also many communities with fewer than 3,000 members, including Seventh-day Adventists, the Catholic Apostolic Church, the Salvation Army, Methodists, Anglicans, and Russian Orthodox. The German minority in southern Jutland and other non-Danish communities (particularly Scandinavian groups) have their own religious groups. Approximately 5.4 percent of the population is not religious, and an estimated 1.5 percent is atheist.

Missionaries operate within the country, including representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses. The European headquarters of the Church of Scientology is located in Copenhagen, although it is not officially recognized as a religion. In 2003, the indigenous belief system known as Forn Sidr, which worships the old Norse gods, was recognized officially as a religion.

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 stipulates that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the national church, the reigning monarch shall be a member the church, and the state shall support it. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the only religious organization that can receive state subsidies or funds directly through the tax system. Approximately 12 percent of the Church's revenue comes from state subsidies; most of the rest comes from the church tax that is paid only by members. No individual may be compelled to pay church tax or provide direct financial support to the national church or any other religious organization. Members of other faiths, notably Catholics, have argued that the system is unfair, and that the Government does not provide religious equality, despite providing religious freedom. Allowing other religious organizations to be given the same status and privileges as the Evangelical Lutheran Church would require changes to the Constitution.

Eleven Christian holy days are considered national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and Christmas Day 2 (December 26). The holidays do not have a negative impact on any religious groups.

Aside from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Government gives official status to religions in two ways: it recognizes religions by royal decree, and it approves religions under the 1969 Marriage Act. As of April 2005, 12 religious organizations were recognized by royal decree, including the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and Russian Orthodox churches as well as Judaism; and 91 were approved, including several Islamic groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christian Orthodox, Hindu, Baha'is, and Hara Krishnas. By approving religions under the 1969 Marriage Act, the Government allows individually

named priests to conduct officially recognized marriage ceremonies, and thereby legally approves the religion.

Both recognized and approved religions enjoy certain tax exemptions. Other religious communities are entitled to practice their faith without any sort of licensing, but their marriage ceremonies are not recognized by the state and they are not granted tax-exempt status.

1999 Guidelines for approval of religious organizations established the following requirements for religious groups: a written text of the religion's central traditions, descriptions of its most important rituals, an organizational structure accessible to public control and approval, and constitutionally elected representatives who may be held responsible by the authorities. Additionally, the organization must "not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order." Scientologists did not seek official approval as a religious organization during the period covered by this report. Their first application for approval was made in the early 1970's and rejected; the second and third applications were made in 1976 and 1982, and both were denied. In mid-1997, the Scientologists filed a fourth application, which was suspended at their request in 2000. In suspending their application, the Scientologists asked the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs to clarify the approval procedure; however, the Ministry told them they must first submit an application before the Ministry can provide any feedback. Despite the Scientologists' unofficial status, the church maintains its European headquarters in Copenhagen.

There are no restrictions on proselytizing or missionary work as long as practitioners obey the law and do not act inconsistently with public morality or order. All schools, including religious schools, receive government financial support. While the Evangelical Lutheran faith is taught in the public schools, a student may withdraw from religious classes with parental consent. Section 76 of the Constitution protects the rights of parents to home school or educate their children in private schools.

During the period covered by the report, the Government considered legislative and administrative proposals to promote further social integration of refugees and immigrants. The proposals emerged out of widespread political and social attitudes favoring the integration of immigrants and refugees. In June 2004, the Parliament enacted a law directed at foreign religious leaders seeking residence visas. The so called "Imam Law," which is applied by immigration authorities to all foreign religious leaders, requires that the number of religious residence visas be reasonably proportioned to the size of the corresponding religious community. Additionally, the visa applicant must prove association with a recognized or approved religious community and possess a relevant background or education as a religious preacher, missionary or member of a religious community. The Ministry for Refugees, Immigrants, and Integration continued to consider providing resources to establish schools to educate imams, similar to the support the Government provides Christian theological university programs or seminaries. Reaction to the proposal in the Muslim community was mixed. Many young Muslims stated that the imams who come to the country on temporary visas do not speak Danish and cannot answer their questions or address the problems of being a young Muslim in the country. However, the Ministry declined to act on the initiative in the fall of 2004, choosing to wait until the country's divided Muslim community could organize to make its own proposal for publicly funded Islamic education.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In December 2004, the Dansk Islamisk Begravelsesfond (Danish Islamic Cemetery Fund), purchased property in the greater Copenhagen area to use for a Muslim cemetery. The purchase was the culmination of a several-year effort by members of the Muslim community to establish the first Muslim cemetery in the country. The Danish Islamic Cemetery Fund overcame a publicized dispute with municipal authorities over the value of the land which prolonged the purchase efforts. The cemetery is expected to open by 2007.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The country has a long history of welcoming religious minorities and affording them equal treatment. There are generally amicable relations between religious groups, although the influx of a substantial Muslim population over the last several years resulted in some tension between Muslims and the rest of the population. In September 2004, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights concluded in a report that the overall political climate for Muslims in the country has deteriorated since 2001.

Minority group unemployment figures, crime rates (especially among young adults), and education drop-out rates tend to be higher, and allegations sometimes are raised of discrimination on the basis of religion. However, it is difficult to separate religious differences from differences in language and ethnicity, and the latter may be equally important in explaining unequal access to well-paying jobs and social advancement. The integration of immigrant groups from Islamic countries is an important political and social topic of discussion. During its national election campaign in February 2005, the coalition center-right Government (successfully re-elected to a four-year term) affirmed its commitment to pursuing and promoting effective integration policies intended to address disproportionately high crime rates and unemployment among immigrants from Islamic countries (and other ethnic minorities in the country.)

There were isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, primarily by immigrants. Most involved vandalism, such as graffiti, or nonviolent verbal assaults. There were also isolated incidents of anti-immigrant graffiti and low-level assaults as well as some denial of service and hiring on racial grounds. The Government criticized the incidents, investigated several, and brought some cases to trial.

The international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continues to operate in the country despite periodic calls by the various political parties to ban the group. The group has not been cited for any illegal activity since 2002, when the spokesman of the Danish branch of the group was sentenced to 60 days probation for distributing pamphlets calling for the murder of all Jews.

From January through June 2004, there were five incidents of anti-Semitic vandalism, primarily graffiti, and one incident of an anti-Semitic mailing, which the Government condemned and investigated.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officers engaged in a Muslim outreach program, which included numerous meetings with religious and community leaders of leading Muslim organizations in the country. Embassy officers had wide-ranging discussions with the Muslim leaders on topics such as religious and cultural diversity, democracy and freedom, and Muslim life in the United States. The Department of State has also sponsored Muslim citizens for International Visitors Programs.

In January 2005, the Embassy participated in targeted Global Anti-Semitism Report outreach by placing an article in the national daily *Kristelig Dagblad* (circ. 25,000), the country's only religious affairs newspaper. The article stressed the need for governments to take uncompromising steps to address the issue of increased anti-Semitic abuses in Europe and Russia. By reporting numerous instances of abuse targeted at the Jewish community, and by describing the nature of both Muslim-inspired and right-wing hostility to the worldwide Jewish community, the article clearly illustrated the contemporary nature of the problem and caused the newspaper's readership (that includes standard target audiences) to reconsider their position on the issue.

In October 2004, the Embassy welcomed university students from the local organization Humanity in Action to the Embassy for a discussion about their upcoming internships with Congress in Washington. The event continued Embassy's cooperation with Humanity in Action, which is a program for college-aged students designed to introduce them to issues involving human rights and minority issues, and also encourages local students to continue to reflect on the rescue efforts of Jews made by citizens during World War II.

ESTONIA

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 as part of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 17,666 square miles and a population of 1.35 million (68 percent ethnic Estonian, 26 percent Russian, 2 percent Ukrainian, 1 percent Belarusian, and 1 percent Finnish). The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) was the largest denomination, with 165 congregations and approximately 170,000 members. The Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC) had 59 congregations with approximately 18,000 members and the Estonian Orthodox Church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP), had 30 congregations with approximately 150,000 members. There were smaller communities of Baptists, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Old Believers, Methodists, and other denominations. There was a small Jewish community with 2,500 members, with one synagogue in operation. There were also communities of Muslims, Buddhists, and many other denominations and faiths; however, each of these religious groups had fewer than 6,000 adherents.

Fifty years of Soviet occupation diminished the role of religion in society. Many neighborhoods built since World War II do not have religious centers, and many of the surviving churches require extensive renovations. The renovation of two churches—St. John's Lutheran Church in Tartu and St. Simeon's and St. Anne's Orthodox Church in Tallinn—was completed during the reporting period. St. John's church, which had been in ruins since 1944, was inaugurated in December 2004. Church attendance, which had seen a surge coinciding with the independence movement in the early 1990s, now has decreased significantly.

Many groups have sent foreign missionaries into the country in recent years; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) had the largest number of missionaries.

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 states that there is no state church.

There are other laws and regulations that directly or indirectly regulate individual and collective freedom of religion. The activities of religious associations are regulated by the Churches and Congregations Act and the Non-Profit Associations and Unions Act. The statutes of churches, congregations, and unions of congregations are registered at the City Courts. The Churches and Congregations Act decrees that the commanding officer of each military unit shall guarantee conscripts the opportunity to practice their religion. Military chaplain services extend to service members of all faiths. The Churches and Congregations Act decrees that prison directors shall ensure inmates the opportunity to practice their religion. Conscripts and prisoners exercised this right in practice. Chaplains are prepared by the Theological Seminary of the Methodist Church and appointed by the Council of Churches. A church, congregation and association of congregations must have management boards. A person who is a citizen or who has the right to vote in local government elections may be a member of the management board. In order to formally register a religious association with the City Court, the management board of the religious association submits an application which is signed by all members of the management board. A congregation must have at least 12 adult members. The minutes of the constitutive meeting, a copy of statutes, and a notarized copy of signatures of the members of the management board serve as supporting documents to the registration application.

A program of basic ecumenical religious instruction was available in public schools. A school is under obligation to offer religious studies at the primary or sec-

ondary level if at least 15 students request it. Comparative religious studies were available in public and private schools on an elective basis. There were no official statistics on how many students participated in these classes. There were two private church schools in Tartu that had a religious-based curriculum.

The Government took steps to promote anti-bias and tolerance education, including continued work by the International Commission for Investigation of Crimes against Humanity on issues related to the German and Soviet occupations of the country. The Government continued to observe the annual Holocaust Remembrance Day. In December, the country was accepted as a liaison member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. A Holocaust education seminar for schoolteachers took place in August 2004, in cooperation with a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) and Sweden's Living History Forum and co-financed by the Ministry of Education.

The property restitution process, by which religious properties were transferred from the state back to religious associations, was carried out under the Principles of Ownership Reform Act that was passed 13 June 1991. The process has largely been completed. By the end of the period covered by this report, most Orthodox Church properties, including those being used by the EOCMP, were under the legal control of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC). However, despite continued political progress, differences over the practical disposition of Orthodox Church property continued between the EAOC and the EOCMP. There were no transfers of property during the period covered by this report.

According to local Jewish leaders, property restitution was not an issue for the community, as most prewar religious buildings were rented, not owned.

Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Christmas, and Pentecost are national holidays.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There was no persecution targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities were generally amicable. Although the majority of citizens were nominally Lutheran, ecumenical services during national days, Christian holidays, or at public events were common.

Most of the religious adherents among the country's Russian-speaking population are Orthodox, while the Estonian majority is mostly Lutheran. There is a deep-seated tradition of tolerance of other denominations and religions.

Three graveyards were vandalized during the period covered by this report. In July 2004, vandals broke eight granite crosses and damaged several others in a German war cemetery in Tallinn. In March 2005, a vandal knocked down three tombstones and damaged one in a Johvi cemetery. In May 2005, two vandals knocked down 39 stone crosses in a German War cemetery in Narva. Authorities initiated misdemeanor proceedings in all cases. Earlier thefts of church property prompted the Estonian Council of Churches and the Board of Antiquities to initiate a database of items under protection. The database, which comprises of digital photos and detailed descriptions, is shared as needed with law enforcement agencies.

In 2003, three skinheads were sentenced to conditional imprisonment for activities that publicly incited hatred on the basis of national origin or race. They were convicted for having drawn swastikas and written anti-Semitic inscriptions on buildings in a north-eastern small town. In June 2005, a person was found guilty by a district court for writing an essay that publicly incited social hatred on the basis of national origin, race, or religion. In his essay, he called for destroying all Christians, and Jews, and all churches. A court case regarding anti-Semitic comments made by a person over the Internet was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officials of the U.S. Embassy met regularly with appropriate government agencies, NGOs, and a wide range of figures in religious circles. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy officials continued to engage the Government and nongovernmental actors to promote dialogue and education on Holocaust issues in the country.

The U.S. Government funded the following projects: a 2-day seminar and a 1-day conference to study and debate the topic, "What has the science of religion to give to a modern student?"; translation of Benjamin Anolik's account of his wartime experiences as a detainee in a Nazi camp in the country "Missia pamjati" into Estonian; and a travel grant to history teachers to attend a teacher training program at the Holocaust Resource Center at Keene State College and at the Holocaust Museum.

FINLAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. According to law, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church are the established state churches.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 130,127 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.2 million. At the end of 2004, 83.6 percent of the population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and one percent belonged to the Orthodox Church. The percentage for the Evangelical Lutheran Church was 84.1 a year earlier. A total of 27,000 people left the Evangelical Lutheran Church, a figure which is virtually the same as the previous year. In 2003, the new Religious Freedom Act simplified procedures for leaving the Church, which has led to an increase in the number of people who do so. Analysts believe that many people who leave the Church do so to avoid paying taxes to support the Church. During 2004, a total of 49,670 children were christened, which accounts for 86 percent of the babies born that year.

Pentecostal Church communities that are registered as associations have approximately 45,000 members. However, only a fraction of Pentecostal Churches are registered, and the actual number of Pentecostal worshippers is probably higher. Various other non-state religions have approximately 60,000 members. An estimated 10 percent of the population does not belong to any religious group. In the past decade, the number of Muslims has grown from 1,000 to approximately 20,000, most of whom are immigrants to the country. Of these, approximately 5,000 are Shiites and 15,000 Sunni. The largest single national group is Somalis, but the communities also include North Africans, Bosnians, peninsula Arabs, Tartars, Turks and Iraqis. There are four major Muslim communities in the country: The Muslim Community in Finland, the Tampere Muslim Community, Shi'a Muslims and the Multicultural Dawa Center of Islam. There are seven Roman Catholic congregations with approximately 8,000 registered members, and two Jewish congregations with 1,513 members.

A Gallup poll, conducted in 2003, showed that locals held a more positive view toward Christian churches and religious groups than in the past. Over one half of those interviewed believed that one was accountable for one's deeds in afterlife. 77 percent held positive views about the Lutheran Church, 65 percent held positive views of the Salvation Army and 62 percent held positive views of the Orthodox Church. A majority of the population held negative views about Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Christian Science, and Islam. People were fairly evenly split on positive and negative perceptions of Judaism.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church conducted a recent study among its employees regarding their religious commitment. Some were surprised that 10 percent of those interviewed were either weakly or not at all committed to the Church doctrines. However, as many as 70 percent of the rest were nonetheless strongly committed. The Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church was satisfied with the results. He stated that any business would be pleased if as many as 9 out of 10 of its employees were committed to the values the company represented.

In 2004, an attendance of nearly 18 million was registered at worship services, christenings, weddings, funerals and other church meetings, e.g. concerts, by the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The congregations have approximately 2,200 choirs and 600 musical bands with a total membership of 44,000. The attraction of Sunday schools has decreased by some ten percent; only 1 child out of 10 in the group of 4 to 10 year-olds attended Sunday school. However, confirmation classes have been the flagship of the Church's youth work, and in 2004 as many as 57,000 youngsters, i.e. some 90 percent of the age group (approximately 15 years) attended.

In the last few decades the Evangelical Lutheran Church has started to show far greater awareness of its international responsibilities. This is reflected in increased support for missionary work and development assistance, and in a greater interest in ecumenical work. Support for missionary work has doubled since the early 1980s, and the proceeds of church collections for foreign aid have increased many times over.

Nontraditional religious groups freely profess and propagate their beliefs. Such groups as Jehovah's Witnesses and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have been active in the country for decades. Other groups include the Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish 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. There are two state churches: the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church. All citizens who belong to either state church pay a church tax set at 1 to 2 percent of income, varying with the congregation, as part of their income tax. Those who do not want to pay the tax must inform the applicable state church that they are leaving it. These taxes are used to defray the costs of running the churches. State churches also handle services such as recording births, deaths, and marriages, which for citizens outside these churches are handled by official state registrars. Nontraditional religious groups are eligible for some tax relief (for example, they may receive tax-free donations), provided that they are registered with, and recognized by, the Government as religious communities.

State subsidies are being planned for religious communities. An Education Ministry taskforce was working on a proposal which it was originally supposed to submit in March 2005, but had not by the end of the period covered in this report. The first subsidies of this kind should be included in the 2007 state budget. The amount of the subsidy would be linked to the number of members of the religious community and be approximately 5 euro (\$7) per person. The smallest communities would not qualify for these subsidies. The funds would have to be applied for separately. Although not of substantial financial significance, the subsidies would nonetheless mean a step toward greater religious equality.

To be recognized, religious groups should have at least 20 members. The purpose of the group should be the public practice of religion, and the activities of the group should be guided by a set of rules. The Government recognizes 55 religious groups.

The new Religious Freedom Act includes regulations on registered religious communities. Their autonomy was increased, and the law on associations is extensively applied to them. As in the old law, a minimum of 20 members is required to form a religious organization. Furthermore, the new law no longer prevents a person from being a member of several religious communities simultaneously. The religious communities will decide independently whether or not their members can belong to other religious communities as well. The one-month reconsideration period and the personal notice of resignation have been abandoned. Resignation can be submitted by mail, and it will take effect immediately upon receipt.

The new law further clarifies that the religious denomination of a child is not automatically determined by the faith of the parents: the child's membership of or resignation from a religious community is always based on a separate expression of the will of the parents/guardians, such as baptizing the child. The independence of the child has been increased so that the denomination of a 12-year old may be changed only by permission of the child.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion. Various government programs available through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor focus on ongoing discrimination, including discrimination based on religion. Studies and research, integration programs, and recommendations for further incorporation of immigrants into society have been the focal points of these programs. Religion has not been highlighted in particular, but remains a part of the Government's overall attempts to combat discrimination.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. There are no reports of verbal or physical violence against persons or property of any minority religious groups.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Some citizens are not very receptive to proselytizing by adherents of nontraditional faiths, in part because of the tendency to regard religion as a private matter.

Nontraditional religious groups are generally free from discrimination despite intolerant attitudes from some members of society.

Immigrants do not encounter difficulties in practicing their faiths; however, they sometimes encounter random discrimination and xenophobia.

An issue raising a fair amount of discussion among the clergy has been whether or not registered couples of the same sex should be given the blessings of the Church. In 2003, the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church meeting decided to table two opposite proposals: one banning access to Church offices for those living in a registered same-sex relationship, and the other proposing Church blessings for such couples. No decisions about this somewhat controversial issue have yet been made.

Two recent cases serve to illustrate the social liberalism among the general public on the one hand, and the more conservative view of the Church itself on the other. The Lutheran Bishop of Turku resigned in early 2005 following allegations of an extramarital affair. Although the Church hierarchy supported the resignation on moral grounds, the Bishop received significant expressions of sympathy from many ordinary members, and a popular movement collected over 5,000 signatures supporting the Bishop.

Another ongoing case involved a doctoral thesis alleging that the female clergy in the Diocese of Oulu (a conservative area in the north) suffered from discrimination, psychological violence and harassment by the previous bishop, who was opposed to female clergy in principle. Nearly all female ministers in the diocese met with opposition from certain male colleagues and superiors. The harassment reportedly occurred from the late 1980s to the beginning of the 2000s. Most citizens strongly support female clergy.

Another current issue of debate involves state-financed fertility treatments. Lutheran Archbishop Jukka Paarma, who occasionally expresses his views on certain political/moral issues that might also be debated in Parliament, commented on the fertility question in May 2005 at a Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Turku. Paarma said that single women and lesbian couples should not receive state-funded fertility treatment to facilitate conception. Paarma rejected the notion that childbearing was an inherent human right that should be supported by the state in all cases. The Archbishop stressed that the focus should always be on the child's rights when considering in-vitro fertilization treatment. In his opinion, these include the right to have a mother and a father. He also clearly established that he did not condemn fertility treatment, calling it a blessing for many married couples.

State churches often speak out in support of the Finnish/Nordic welfare state model, couching social welfare state values in religious or moral terms. Preaching at the opening of the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in May 2004, the bishop of Espoo expressed his position on the Kyoto Climate agreement, saying the

country should not withdraw from it because of short-term national interests. A senior politician of the Greens immediately commended the Church for taking a stance on an issue that was not directly related to religion, but to the general welfare of people.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall dialogue and policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives periodically meet with representatives of various religious communities (both mainstream and nontraditional) to discuss religious freedom issues.

The Ambassador met with a delegation of American and Finnish Orthodox Church leaders to discuss issues of shared concern, including religious tolerance, ecumenical exchanges, trafficking-in-persons, and other transnational problems confronting modern societies.

An Embassy officer spoke to the Orthodox Seminary and several other religious gatherings on the relationship between church and state in the United States and on the role of American faith-based institutions in charitable assistance. This was part of an initiative by local Orthodox ecclesiastical leaders to promote tolerance and understanding.

In August 2004, the Embassy hosted an outreach reception for the country's Muslim community. The reception brought together a diverse group of Muslim immigrants representing many different ethnic and religious communities. The aim of the reception was to promote discussion and debate over the experience of Muslim immigrants in the country and their concerns over religious and political issues both within the country and internationally.

FRANCE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, some religious groups remain concerned about legislation passed in 2001 and 2004, which provided for the dissolution of groups under certain circumstances and banned the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols by public school employees and students. A 1905 law on the separation of religion and State prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. A law prohibiting the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools by employees and students entered into force in September 2004. Despite significant efforts by the Government to combat anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic attacks and incidents persisted. The Government has a stated policy of monitoring potentially "dangerous" cult activity through the Inter-ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES).

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to freedom of religion. Anti-Semitic incidents at the end of 2004 and in the first half of 2005 declined from previous record levels, but continued to occur at a disturbing rate. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to criticize strongly anti-Semitic and racist violence, and the Government maintained increased security for Jewish institutions.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 211,209 square miles, and its population is approximately 62.4 million.

The Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. According to press reports, only 12 percent of the population attends religious services of any faith more than once per month. In a poll released in December 2004, 64.3 percent of the respondents indicated they were Catholic, even if they never attended religious services. Another 27 percent polled stated they had no religious affiliation, while 8.7 percent cited another religious affiliation. Of those who identified themselves as something other than Catholic, 49.4 percent were Muslim, 21.8 percent were Protestant, 7 percent were Jewish, and 21.8 percent responded with another, unspecified religion. A February 2004 poll indicated that 60 percent of those interviewed believed in God, and 12 percent attended religious services often. The vast majority of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, but according to one mem-

ber of the Catholic hierarchy, only 8 percent of the population are practicing Catholics. Muslims constitute the second largest religious group. There are an estimated 5 to 6 million Muslims in the country (8 to 10 percent of the population), although estimates of how many of these are practicing Muslims vary widely. Protestants make up 2 percent of the population, and the Jewish and Buddhist faiths each represent 1 percent, and those of the Sikh faith less than 1 percent. According to various estimates, approximately 6 percent of the country's citizens are unaffiliated with any religion.

The Jewish community numbers approximately 600,000. According to press reports, at least 60 percent are not highly observant, celebrating at most only the High Holy Days. The large majority of observant Jews are Orthodox. There are small Conservative and Reform congregations as well.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that 250,000 persons attend their services either regularly or periodically.

Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; the vast majority is associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church.

Other religions present in the country include evangelicals, Christian Scientists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Membership in evangelical churches is growing because of increased participation by African and Antillean immigrants. According to the press, there are approximately 31,000 Mormons. The Church of Scientology has an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 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. A long history of conflict between religious groups and between the Church and the French Republic led the state to break its ties to the Catholic Church early in the last century and adopt a strong commitment to maintaining a totally secular public sector. The 1905 law on the separation of religion and State, the foundation of existing legislation on religious freedom, prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith. Of the country's 10 national holidays, 5 are Christian holy days.

Religious organizations are not required to register, but may if they wish to apply for tax-exempt status or to gain official recognition. The Government defines two categories under which religious groups may register: "associations culturelles" (associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes) and "associations culturelles" (cultural associations, which are normally not exempt from taxes). Associations in these two categories are subject to certain management and financial disclosure requirements. An association of worship may organize only religious activities, defined as liturgical services and practices. A cultural association may engage in profit-making activity. Although a cultural association is not exempt from taxes, it may receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations, such as schools. Religious groups normally register under both of these categories; the Mormons, for example, run strictly religious activities through their association of worship and operate a school under their cultural association.

Under the 1905 statute, religious groups must apply with the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and to receive tax-exempt status. The prefecture reviews the submitted documentation regarding the association's purpose for existence. To qualify, the group's purpose must be solely the practice of some form of religious ritual. Printing publications, employing a board president, or running a school may disqualify a group from tax-exempt status.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 109 of 1,138 Protestant associations, 15 of 147 Jewish associations, and approximately 30 of 1,050 Muslim associations have tax-free status. Approximately 100 Catholic associations are tax-exempt; a representative of the Ministry of Interior reports that the number of non-tax-exempt Catholic associations is too numerous to estimate accurately. More than 50 associations of the Jehovah's Witnesses have tax-free status.

According to the 1905 law, associations of worship are not taxed on the donations that they receive. However, the prefecture may decide to review a group's status if the association receives a large donation or legacy that comes to the attention of the tax authorities. If the prefecture determines that the association is not in fact in conformity with the 1905 law, its status may be changed, and it may be required to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on present and past donations.

The 2001 About-Picard Law tightened restrictions on associations and provided for the dissolution of groups, including religious groups, under certain conditions. These include: endangering the life or the physical or psychological well-being of a person; placing minors at mortal risk; violation of another person's freedom, dignity,

or identity; the illegal practice of medicine or pharmacology; false advertising; and fraud or falsification.

For historical reasons, the Jewish, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace and Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these religious groups. Adherents of these four religious groups may choose to have a portion of their income tax allocated to their religious organization in a system administered by the central government.

Central or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before the 1905 law separating religion and State. In Alsace and Moselle, special laws allow the local governments to provide support for the building of religious edifices. The Government partially funded the establishment of the country's oldest Islamic house of worship, the Paris mosque, in 1926.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from visa requirements to enter the country must obtain a three-month tourist visa before leaving their own country. All missionaries who wish to remain in the country longer than 90 days must obtain visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must apply with the local prefecture for a *carte de sejour* (a document that allows a foreigner to remain in the country for a given period of time) and must provide the prefecture a letter from their sponsoring religious organization.

Public schools are secular. In March 2004, the Government passed legislation prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, the Jewish skullcap, and large crosses; the legislation took effect at the beginning of the school year in September 2004. Religious instruction is not given in public schools, but religious facts are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may home-school children for religious reasons, but all schooling must conform to the standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions. The Government subsidizes private schools, including those that are affiliated with religious organizations.

The Government has made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. Denial of crimes against humanity is illegal. The Government has programs to combat racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns and through encouraging dialogue among local officials, police, and citizen groups. Government leaders, along with representatives from the Jewish community, the Paris and Marseille Grand Mosques, the Protestant Federation, and the French Conference of Bishops have publicly condemned racist and anti-Semitic violence. In 2003, a law was passed against crimes of a "racist, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic" nature; the law classifies racist motivations for violent acts as aggravating circumstances and mandates harsher punishment for these crimes. March 2004 legislation further increased punishment for "hate" crimes. The Government regularly applies these laws in prosecuting anti-Semitic crimes.

The Government consults with the major religious communities through various formal mechanisms. The Catholic community is represented by the Council of Bishops. In 2002, the Government and the Catholic Church initiated an institutional dialogue focusing on administrative and judicial matters, such as chaplaincy services.

The Protestant Federation of France, established in 1905, comprises 16 churches and 60 associations. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community. It also acts as an interlocutor with the Government.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, includes the Jewish "worship associations" from the entire country. It acts as a liaison with the Government, trains rabbis, and responds to other needs of the Jewish community. In 1943, Jewish members of the French Resistance formed the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF). The CRIF's mission is to fight anti-Semitism, preserve the memory of the Holocaust, affirm solidarity with Israel, and promote peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The national French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) and 25 affiliated regional councils serve as interlocutors for the Muslim community with local and national officials on such civil-religious issues as mosque construction and certification of halal butchers. In November 2004, then-Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of a Foundation for French Islam which will assist in the funding of mosques, provide a transparent vehicle for individual and foreign donations, and assist in the training of foreign imams in the French language, history, and civics.

The Inter-ministerial Monitoring Mission against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES) is charged with observing and analyzing sect/cult movements that constitute a

threat to public order or that violate French law, coordinating the appropriate responses to abuses by cults, informing the public about potential risks, and helping victims to receive aid.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In March 2004, on the recommendation of an inter-ministerial commission established by the president to study secularism, integration, and the place of religion in the country, the Government passed a law prohibiting the wearing of “conspicuous” religious symbols—including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps, and large crosses—by employees and students in public schools. In June 2004, the European Commission on Human Rights ruled that the law did not violate the freedom of religion; the law was implemented in September 2004. Some Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments voiced concerns about the law’s potential to restrict religious freedom. By school year’s end in June 2005, the Ministry of Education reports that 44 Muslim girls and 3 Sikh boys had been expelled from public school for violating this law; all had reportedly enrolled in private schools, distance education courses, or schools abroad. One Muslim group, however, indicates that the law has adversely affected 806 Muslim girls, whether by causing them to seek alternative educational options or requiring them to remove their veil. Media reports estimate that of the 13 million schoolchildren, approximately 1,200 Muslim school-aged girls wear veils. The Sikh community reports that of the roughly 200 school-aged Sikh boys, 84 percent are affected by the legislation.

The Paris Court of Appeals rejected a telemarketing firm’s appeal of a 2003 ruling in favor of a young woman who sought reinstatement, damages, and interest after she was fired by the telemarketing firm for refusing to wear her headscarf in a manner deemed appropriate by her employer. A Lyon administrative appeals court rejected the case of a civil servant who filed a lawsuit after being disciplined in 2002 for wearing a Muslim headscarf at work, ruling that she had violated the principle of neutrality in the public service and disobeyed the orders of her superiors. Some Muslim and Sikh groups have protested the Government policy prohibiting the wearing of the head coverings in national identity photos. A case brought before the highest French court for administrative matters by a Sikh wishing to be permitted to wear his turban in driver’s license and passport photos was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

In July 2004, Parliament passed a law permitting the expulsion of individuals for “inciting discrimination, hatred or violence against a specific person or group of persons.” Abdelkader Bouziane, an imam, was deported from the country in October, accused of publicly justifying wife-beating in an article.

The Government continued to encourage public caution toward some minority religions that it considers “cults.” Mass suicides in 1994 by members of the Order of the Solar Temple led to heightened public concern about “cult” behavior. In 1995, a parliamentary commission studying so-called cults issued a report that identified 173 groups as cults, including the Raelians, the Association of the Triumphant Vajra, the Order of the Solar Temple, Sukyo Mahikari, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Theological Institute of Nimes (an evangelical Christian Bible college), and the Church of Scientology. The Government has not banned any of the groups on the list; however, members of some of the groups listed have alleged instances of intolerance because of the ensuing publicity. In May 2005, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin issued a Circular indicating that the Parliamentary list should no longer be used to identify sects, and authorities should instead focus their efforts on those sects that represent the greatest threat, notably those “small, fluid” groups that are “less easily identifiable” and which use the internet for recruitment. Some religious groups have hailed the move as a step forward, but call for Ministry of Justice Circulars emphasizing repressive measures against minority religions to be rescinded.

In January 2005, MIVILUDES published a guide for public servants instructing them how to spot and combat “dangerous” sects. There are several instances where French law regarding the right of patients to refuse medical treatment is noted, as well as subsequent court decisions. The Jehovah’s Witnesses are mentioned as an organization that refuses blood transfusions, and there is mention of Health Ministry guidance to encourage treatment while respecting patient wishes. Some groups expressed concern that this guide would be misused by overzealous public servants against legitimate religious organizations.

Some observers remained concerned about the 2001 About-Picard law which permits the dissolution of religious groups, if it is established that group practices are believed to violate basic rights. In 2002, the Council of Europe passed a resolution critical of the law and invited the Government to reconsider it. The law remained in force. Although the provisions allowing for the dissolution of groups have never

been applied, another aspect of the law was utilized for the first time against the leader of a cult. Arnaud Mussy, the founder and spiritual head of the group Neo-Phare, was convicted in November 2004 of fraudulent abuse of the state of ignorance and the weakness of four followers. Mussy claimed to be the reincarnation of Christ and made several predictions in 2000 regarding the pending apocalypse; one of his adherents killed himself and two other followers attempted suicide allegedly because of the state of mind brought on by Mussy's manipulation. He has appealed the decision.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination, frivolous lawsuits, and prosecution for allegedly fraudulent activity. In 2003, the Court of Appeals of Paris fined the Paris-region Spiritual Association of the Church of Scientology approximately \$6,100 (5,000 euros) for breaking a law on information privacy; the decision was appealed. Church of Scientology representatives report that a case filed by a parent whose child attended an "Applied Scholastics"-based school remained ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. In March 2004, the police intelligence agency, Renseignements Generaux (RG), was instructed by the Administrative Tribunal of Paris to comply with a 2003 decision by the Council of State and provide the Church of Scientology with its files on the group, or be fined. The RG had refused to accede to the Church of Scientology's request since 2000, citing "public safety" concerns.

Some observers voiced concerns about the tax authorities' scrutiny of the financial records of some religious groups. In October 2004, the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses lost their appeal to the Court of Cassation on a 2002 ruling that they must pay \$62.3 million (45.7 million euros) in back taxes. The members claimed that they were discriminatorily and punitively audited because of their classification as a cult, and that authorities adopted a new administrative regulation to retroactively tax "manual donations" offered by adherents. The association further alleged that this tax had not been applied to any other not-for-profit or religious organization, and the amount of the tax exceeds the assets of the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country. The case has been submitted to the European Court of Human Rights and was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In late 2003, the Ministry of Education created a national commission to combat anti-Semitism in schools and the Government continued efforts to promote tolerance and combat racism and anti-Semitism throughout the reporting period. In August 2004, the Mayor of Paris sent letters to all Paris-area principals calling for "debates on anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination" when classes resumed in September.

Additionally, the Government has taken other proactive steps to fight anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attacks, including instructing police commissioners to create monitoring units in each department and creating a department-level Council of Religions to raise public awareness of increased racial and sectarian assaults and other incidents.

The number of reported racist and anti-Semitic incidents rose to a new high during 2004, particularly during the first half of the year, which is covered by last year's report. The number of such incidents in the period covered by this report has decreased sharply. According to the Ministry of Interior, there were 290 anti-Semitic acts in the first six months of 2005, down 48 percent from the 561 incidents recorded during the same period in 2004. Violent acts dropped even more dramatically, with 49 occurring in the first half of 2005 as opposed to 148 in 2004. The Government attributed the decreases to the culmination of efforts initiated since 2002, including a beneficial dialogue with the Jewish community and the determination of the State's internal security forces.

In June 2005, Rabbi Michel Serfaty, co-president of the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association (AJMF), launched a tour of Jewish and Muslim leaders throughout the country during the same time as the famous Tour de France cycling race to promote dialogue between the two communities. The organizers reported overall positive responses to the initiative.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a number of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the period covered by this report. The Council of Christian Churches in France is composed of three Protestant, three Catholic, and three Orthodox Christian representatives. It serves as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialogue among the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish communities, which discusses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

In June 2004, the Government commissioned Jean-Christophe Rufin, a doctor, writer, and president of the humanitarian association Action against Hunger, to prepare an in-depth report on racism and anti-Semitism in the country. The Rufin report, released in October, concluded that racism and anti-Semitism were a threat to French democracy and that anti-Semitic acts are not only carried out by elements of the extreme right and youth of North African descent, but also by “disaffected individuals” whose anti-Semitic obsessions prompt their attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions. The Rufin report also warned against radical anti-Zionists who question Israel’s right to exist. The report recommended that a law be created to punish those publicly equating Israel with apartheid or Nazi Germany. Additionally, the report concludes that the press law of 1881, designed to guarantee freedom of the press, is too unwieldy to adequately address the issues of racism and anti-Semitism. It recommends removing from the press law all injunctions against incitement to racism and anti-Semitism and putting them into a new law written to specifically address these issues. The Rufin report also called for countering intolerance in primary schools and educating new immigrants about the fight against racism and anti-Semitism. Finally, the report advised following the recommendation of the Movement against Racism and for Community Friendship (MRAP) to create an observation system to monitor racist and anti-Semitic websites and work closely with authorities to prosecute offenders.

In a March 2005 annual report to the Prime Minister, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (NCCHR) indicated that there were 1,565 racist and anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, nearly double the 833 recorded in 2003. The number of anti-Semitic incidents—including physical assaults, attacks against property, cemetery desecrations, threats, and reported insults—increased from 601 in 2003 to 970 in 2004. Disturbingly, the number of incidents occurring in schools nearly tripled. There have been no reported deaths due to anti-Semitic violence since 1995, but 36 persons were injured in anti-Semitic attacks in 2004.

Based on investigations of the incidents, the NCCHR concluded that people from an “Arab-Muslim background” committed the majority of anti-Semitic acts and represented 104 of the 209 individuals questioned. The large increase in anti-Semitic incidents since 2000 has been attributed to the beginning of the Second Intifada, the war in Iraq, and other events in the Middle East; however, the report remarks that 2004’s increase does not correlate to current events and warns that “anti-Semitism is becoming established in a continuous and lasting manner.”

The report noted that the number of incidents decreased dramatically in the fourth quarter of 2004 and expressed hope that the trend would continue into 2005. The Ministry of Interior reports that in 2004, there were 182 individuals arrested for anti-Semitic incidents. The Ministry of Justice, which uses different criteria in its collection of data, registered 387 anti-Semitic acts in 2004. The Justice Ministry reported in the NCCHR report that 95percent of incidents prosecuted resulted in some form of punishment.

The Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in the country (CRIF) operated a hotline to register allegations of threats in the greater Paris region. Additionally, the CRIF contributed an analysis of anti-Semitic acts and threats in the NCCHR’s 2004 annual report. Based on its own information and that of the Jewish Community Protection Service (CSPCJ), the CRIF registered 95 anti-Semitic incidents during the first six months of 2005, as opposed to 590 for the entire year in 2004, 516 in 2002, and 503 in 2003. The CRIF stated in the NCCHR report that its figures do not always correspond to those of the Government, as victims do not always report their attacks to both the police and the CRIF.

In April 2005, CRIF condemned the sale of anti-Semitic cassettes by the Committee for the Well-being and Rescue for Palestinians (CBSP) at the annual meeting of the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF). The president of the UOIF called the situation “regrettable” and lamented that the situation had not been brought to his attention earlier, so as to prevent the dissemination. He stated, “We cannot tolerate the sale of such cassettes, this is an incitation to racial hatred, an incitation against religions. This is unacceptable.”

In November 2004, a group of students visiting Auschwitz were accused of inappropriate behavior, including running, throwing snowballs, smiling next to pictures of deportees, and in the case of one student, making comments that approved of the Nazis actions. In January 2005, an appeals court rejected the appeals of two of the disciplined students, upholding the permanent expulsion for the student who made the remarks and confirming a 15-day suspension for another student.

In October 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called comments by Radio France International editor Alain Menargues "unacceptable." Menargues called Israel a "racist" state while publicizing his book on the West Bank security barrier. Menargues resigned as a result of his comments.

In October 2004, Bruno Gollnisch, a part-time university professor in Lyon, Member of the European Parliament, and vice-president of the extreme-right National Front, made several comments regarding the Holocaust to the media, questioning the use of gas chambers and stating, "I'm not contesting the existence of concentration camps, but as for the number of dead, historians might want to debate on it." In March 2005, he was banned from teaching at his university for five years; he has appealed the decision. In September, he will appear in court on charges of contesting crimes against humanity; however, he currently maintains immunity due to his position as a member of the European Parliament.

Jewish organizations and the Government criticized al-Manar, a Lebanese Hezbollah satellite channel, for consistently airing anti-Semitic programming, including an anti-Semitic television series during Ramadan in 2003. In July 2004, the Government amended the telecommunication laws, giving new regulatory powers over satellite broadcasts to the Audio Visual Superior Council (CSA). The CSA signed a one-year, limited license with al-Manar in November that included provisions banning expression of anti-Semitic sentiments, favorable coverage of suicide bombers and other terrorists, and incitement to racial and religious hatred. Shortly thereafter, the CSA petitioned the State Council, the country's highest administrative court, to ban the station based on the broadcaster's failure to curb anti-Semitic programming despite the restricted license agreement. In December 2004, the State Council banned altogether the transmission of al-Manar in the country. Prime Minister Raffarin called al-Manar's anti-Semitic programming "incompatible with French values" and urged the issue of satellite broadcasts be taken up at the European Union level. The country has also banned Sahar 1, an Iranian satellite station that broadcast similarly anti-Semitic and anti-Israel programming.

In 2003, after an arson attack destroyed a Jewish school in Gagny, President Chirac stated "an attack on a Jew is an attack on France" and ordered the formation of an inter-ministerial committee charged with leading an effort to combat anti-Semitism. Since its first meeting in 2003, the committee has worked to improve government coordination in the fight against anti-Semitism, including the timely publication of statistics and reinforced efforts to prosecute attackers.

Authorities condemned anti-Semitic attacks, maintained heightened security at Jewish institutions, investigated the attacks, made arrests, and pursued prosecutions. The Government maintained increased security for Jewish institutions. More than 13 mobile units, totaling more than 1,200 police officers, have been assigned to those locales having the largest Jewish communities. Fixed or mobile police are present in the schools, particularly during the hours when children are entering or leaving school buildings. All of these measures were coordinated closely with leaders of the Jewish communities in the country, notably the CRIF.

The Government took other steps to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance, particularly among young people; however, some groups asserted that the judicial system was lax in its sentencing of anti-Semitic offenders. During the period covered by this report, schools have emphasized the need for tolerance and copies of the film "Shoah" were distributed to all high schools for use in history and civics classes.

The Government has taken other proactive steps to fight anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attacks, including instructing police commissioners to create monitoring units in each national department and announcing in June 2004 the creation of a department-level Council of Religions to raise public awareness of increased racial and anti-sectarian incidents. In September, the Mayor of Paris launched a campaign to fight all forms of intolerance that included 1,200 municipal billboards and bulletins in major newspapers.

International organizations have voiced support for the Government's efforts to combat anti-Semitism. In September 2004, representatives of the American Jewish Committee visited Paris to meet with government officials. They commended the country's tough approach to fighting anti-Semitism. The group's executive director stated, "I think France today realizes the seriousness of the struggle, and is mobilizing its government and its forces to fight against it." Following the publication

of the Rufin report in October 2004, Israel's Ambassador to France called the report "exceptional." He continued, "France had the courage to accept the conclusions of the report and the change at the level of the intelligentsia, the authorities, and the media is remarkable." On January 23, 2005, the Global Forum against Anti-Semitism, a group under the auspices of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office and the Jewish Agency, released its annual report. Based on its methods of measurement, incidents in the country stayed relatively level and, in fact, declined in the second half of the year. According to the report, "Over the past year, French authorities have invested significant effort in fighting, and educating against, anti-Semitism." Members of the Arab/Muslim community experienced incidents of harassment and vandalism, particularly on the island of Corsica. In November 2004, assailants opened fire on an imam as he answered a knock at the door of the Muslim Cultural Association of Sartene, in southern Corsica. The imam was uninjured. In December 2004, there were two attacks against a building housing immigrants. The attacks have caused some families to move to the mainland or return to their countries of origin.

The attacks were blamed on elements of the island's nationalist movement, and many incidents involved graffiti with such slogans as "Arabs Out" and "Corsica for the Corsicans" written in the Corsican language. In November 2004, police placed 14 members of the nationalist group *Clandestini Corsi* under investigation. In December, Corsican authorities held a week of events aimed at increasing awareness of the danger of racism and promoting co-existence between immigrant and native Corsican populations.

According to the NCCHR, there were 595 racist acts recorded in 2004, up sharply from the 232 committed in 2003. The NCCHR study reported that, while responsible for 90 percent of acts between 1994 and 1999, far-right extremists were responsible for 14 percent of incidents in 2002 and 18 percent in 2003. However, 2004 marked a resurgence in extreme-right activity, which was cited as the motivating factor in 30 percent of the racist and anti-Semitic incidents. The NCCHR noted a shift, remarking that right-wing elements appeared to target individuals of Arab-Muslim background (292 acts) more often than those of Jewish origin (169 acts).

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Muslim headscarves may have led to incidents of discrimination against Muslim women. Members of the Muslim community alleged that, when wearing headscarves, they had been refused service by private businesses. Media reports indicated that some companies discourage women employees from wearing the headscarf or encourage them to wear a *bandanna* in its place.

In September 2004, a court handed down a 4-month suspended sentence and a \$13,624 (10,000 euros) fine to a woman who refused to sell property to an Arab couple.

Cemeteries and religious sites were often targets of attack; the Interior Ministry announced desecrations and destructive acts at 92 Christian, 31 Jewish, and 28 Muslim sites in 2004. Many of these incidents occurred in Alsace, where extreme-right groups have ties to similar groups across the border in Germany; some have linked the attacks against Jewish and Muslim sites to the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. In May 2005, approximately 60 gravestones were smashed and a swastika drawn on a door of a Jewish cemetery in Sarreguemines (eastern France) shortly after the memorial service for the town's Holocaust victims had been held. Two young vandals, aged 14 and 12, were caught and confessed to having committed the act "out of foolishness."

On May 18, 2005, the Government approved a Ministry of Interior decision to disband the neo-Nazi group *Elsass Korps*.

In May 2005, a Versailles court of appeals found the authors and publisher of a 2002 article titled "Israel-Palestine: The Cancer" guilty of "racial defamation" for anti-Semitic content. Journalists Edgar Morin, Daniele Sallenave, and Sami Nair, as well as editor Jean-Marie Colombani have been ordered to pay the legal fees of the prosecuting groups and \$1.20 (1 euro) each in damages. The publishing newspaper, *Le Monde*, has been ordered to print a retraction. The decision has been controversial, particularly as one of the authors, Edgar Morin, is Jewish. A judge dismissed the initial complaint, ruling that any reasonable reader would not equate criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and his supporters as an attack on all Jews, but an appeals court found that three sentences in the article violated a 1990 antiracism law. *Le Monde* and the authors of the article have appealed the decision.

On June 13, 2005, a Paris court ordered French internet service providers to block the website of the French revisionist organization Association of Former Connoisseurs of War and Holocaust Stories (AAARGH) to French viewers. Two of three American ISPs have agreed to stop hosting AAARGH's website.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Representatives from the Embassy have met several times with government officials responsible for religious freedom issues. These issues have been raised regularly in meetings with other officials and Members of Parliament. The Embassy encourages interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance. In October 2004, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar for Muslim community leaders to mark the end of the day's fast and recognize the significance of the month of Ramadan to Muslims. Embassy officers also meet regularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved in the issue. The Embassy facilitates the visits of American Members of Congress and Congressional Commissions, as well as Congressional staff members and representatives from other Government agencies, to discuss religious freedom issues with religious leaders and senior government officials.

GEORGIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, local authorities sometimes restricted the rights of members of nontraditional religious minority groups.

During the period covered by this report, the status of religious freedom improved. Attacks on religious minorities, including violence, verbal harassment, and disruption of services and meetings, decreased. The Government arrested and sentenced to imprisonment the excommunicated Orthodox priest, Father Basil Mkalavishvili, but did not initiate criminal trials against several other instigators of religiously motivated violence. In April, the Government passed a law enabling religious groups to register. The Government also passed a law on general education that partly improved regulation of religious freedom in schools. Local harassment, both verbal and physical, of nontraditional minority religions continued. Although police were generally more responsive to the needs of minority religious groups, they failed at times to adequately protect these groups.

Citizens generally do not interfere with traditional (Orthodox, Muslim, or Jewish) religious groups; however, there is widespread suspicion of nontraditional ones. Government officials contributed to this negative attitude by sometimes making derogatory statements about certain religious minorities, especially Jehovah's Witnesses. Repeated, reputable public opinion polls indicated that a majority of citizens believe that nontraditional minority religious groups are detrimental to the state and that the prohibition of some of these groups is desirable.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other Embassy officials repeatedly raised U.S. Government concerns about the status of nontraditional religious groups and the harassment of nontraditional religious minorities with President Mikheil Saakashvili, senior government officials, and Members of Parliament (M.P.s). They also encouraged these officials to amend legislation to improve religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 25,900 square miles and its population is approximately 4.4 million. Most ethnic Georgians (more than 80 percent of the population, according to the 2002 census) nominally associate themselves with the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). According to common Orthodox practice, Orthodox churches serving other non-Georgian ethnic groups, such as Russians, Armenians, and Greeks, are under the territorial jurisdiction of the GOC. Non-Georgian Orthodox churches generally use the language of their communicants. In addition, there are a small number of mostly ethnic Russian adherents from three dissident Orthodox schools: The Molokani, Staroveriy (Old Believers), and Dukhoboriy (Spirit Wrestlers), few of whom remain in the country. Under Soviet rule, the number of active churches and priests declined sharply and religious education was nearly nonexistent. Membership in the GOC has continued to increase since independence in 1991. The Church maintains 4 theological seminaries, 2 academies, several schools, and 27 church dioceses; it has approximately 700 priests, 250 monks, and 150 nuns. The Church is headed by Catholicos Patriarch, Ilia II; the Patriarchate is located in Tbilisi.

Several religions, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam, traditionally have coexisted with Georgian Orthodoxy. Some religions are related to ethnicity. Azeris comprise the second largest ethnic group (approximately 285,000, 7 percent of the population), and are largely Muslim; most live in the southeastern region of Kvemo-Kartli, where they constitute a majority. Armenians are the third largest ethnic group (approximately 249,000, 6 percent of the population), comprising the majority of the population in the southern Javakheti region. Armenians largely belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Approximately 9.9 percent of the population is nominally Muslim. There are three main Muslim populations: Ethnic Azeris, ethnic Georgian Muslims of Ajara, and ethnic Chechen Kists in northeastern Georgia. There are four large madrassahs (Muslim religious schools) attached to mosques in eastern Georgia, two of which are Shi'ite and financed by Iranian religious groups, and two of which are Sunni and financed by Turkish religious groups. There are also several smaller madrassahs in Ajara that are financed by Turkey.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is the third largest religious group. Approximately 3.9 percent of the population belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church. All other religious groups constitute less than one percent of the population each.

Judaism, which has been present since ancient times, is practiced in a number of communities throughout the country, particularly in the largest cities, Tbilisi and Kutaisi. Approximately 4,000 Jews remain in the country following two large waves of emigration: the first in the early 1970s and the second during perestroika in the late 1980s. Before then, officials estimate there were approximately 40,000 Jews. The ethnic Greek Orthodox Christian community also used to be very large, with a population over 100,000, but emigration waves since independence have reduced this population to approximately 15,000. A small number of Kurdish Yezidis (approximately 18,000) have also lived in the country for centuries. There are small numbers of Lutheran worshipers (fewer than 1,000), mostly among descendants of German communities that first settled in the country several hundred years ago. There are also approximately 35,000 Roman Catholics, largely ethnic Georgians or Assyrians.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Protestant denominations have become more active and prominent. They include Baptists (composed of Russian, Georgian, Armenian, Ossetian, and Kurdish groups totaling approximately 8,000 adherents); Seventh-day Adventists (local representatives state that there are approximately 350 members); Pentecostals (both Georgian and Russian, estimated at approximately 9,000 adherents); Jehovah's Witnesses (local representatives state that the group has been in the country since 1953 and has approximately 16,000 adherents); and the New Apostolic Church. The number of Mormons in the country is small. There also are a few Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and Buddhists. The membership of all these groups combined is officially estimated at 34,000 persons.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, local officials, police, and other security officials at times harassed nontraditional religious minority groups and their foreign missionaries. The Constitution recognizes the special role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the country's history but also stipulates the independence of the Church from the State. A Constitutional Agreement between the Government and the Georgian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (the Concordat) was signed and ratified by Parliament in 2002. The Concordat recognizes the special role of the GOC and devolves authority over all religious matters to it, including matters outside the Church. The GOC enjoys tax-free status and is often consulted in matters of Government policy.

The President, Minister of the Interior, and Government Ombudsman have been effective advocates for religious freedom and have made numerous public speeches and appearances in support of minority religious groups. The Minister of the Interior, police and Procuracy have become more active in the protection of religious freedom but sometimes have failed to pursue criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their previous attacks against religious minorities. The Human Rights unit in the Legal Department of the Procuracy is charged with protecting human rights, including religious freedom.

During the Soviet era, the GOC largely was suppressed and subordinated to political entities and the Committee for State Security (KGB), as were many other religious institutions; many churches were destroyed or turned into museums, concert halls, and other secular establishments. In the late 1980s, policies initiated by the

Soviet government allowed the present Patriarch to begin reconsecrating churches formerly closed throughout the country. The Church remains very active in the restoration of these religious facilities and lobbies the Government for the return of properties that were held by the Church before the country's incorporation into the Soviet Union. (Church authorities have claimed that 20 to 30 percent of the country's land area at one time belonged to the Church.)

Georgia celebrates all Orthodox holy days. On March 21, President Saakashvili announced that the Muslim New Year would become a voluntary holiday for local citizens of the Muslim faith.

In April, Parliament passed an amendment to the Civil Code allowing for the registration of religious groups. Before the law was passed, religious groups were required to register as public (i.e. state-regulated) entities, but the law provided no mechanism to do this. Nevertheless, the Administrative Violations Code stipulated a fine for any unregistered religious groups. Furthermore, because unregistered organizations were not recognized as legal entities, they could not rent office space, import literature, or construct buildings of worship, among other activities. Individual members of unregistered organizations could engage in these activities as individuals, but were exposed to personal legal liability. The new amendment allows for religions to register as private, non-commercial entities. Additionally, Parliament removed the article from the Administrative Violations Code fining unregistered religions. Religious groups that perform humanitarian services may also register as charitable organizations, although religious and other organizations may likewise perform humanitarian services and religious rituals without registration.

During the period covered by the report, the Government offered a religious course on Orthodox Theology in public schools. The GOC had exclusive influence over the material taught in these courses. While the course was elective, students reported receiving pressure to take it, and almost all students did. A law on education passed in April stipulates that teachers may no longer participate in prayers, proselytize, or preach any religion on school territory, thus in theory, excluding this course. However, the Ministry of Education has announced that schools will continue to offer this course until textbooks for a new course on the history of world religions can be prepared to replace it. The Ministry of Education estimates this will take at least 3 years.

In fall 2004, an official in the Ministry of Sport, Culture and Heritage solicited the opinion of the Patriarch about the legitimacy of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the appropriateness of CRS's Building for the Future program which had just been launched. At about the same time, some politicians openly criticized CRS and questioned whether its programs were intended to "catholicize" youth. In response, the Patriarch held a cordial meeting with CRS representatives in June 2005 during which he praised CRS programs and suggested regular meetings between GOC and CRS to allay community fears.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The GOC enjoys a tax-exempt status not available to other religious groups, and lobbied Parliament and the Government for laws that would grant it special status and restrict the activities of missionaries from nontraditional religions. The 2002 Concordat between the Church and State defines relations between the two. The Concordat contained several controversial articles, giving the Patriarch of the Church immunity, granting the Church exclusive access to the military chaplaincy, exempting clergymen from military service, and giving the Church a unique consultative role in government, especially in the sphere of education. Article 6.6 can be—and under the Shevardnadze regime was—interpreted to give the GOC approval authority over all religious literature, symbols, construction and importation, whether Georgian Orthodox or not. The Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, and Armenian Apostolic churches, as well as representatives of the Jewish and Muslim faiths, signed formal documents with the Orthodox Patriarchate agreeing to the Concordat, but stated after the document was published that several of these controversial articles were not in the original. Representatives of nontraditional minority religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals, were not included in the Concordat process. The Roman Catholic and Armenian Churches have raised concerns about the authority the Orthodox Church enjoys over decisions regarding the return of its historical church property.

While most citizens practice their religion without restriction, the worship of some, particularly members of nontraditional faiths, has been restricted by threats and intimidation from some local Orthodox priests and congregations. On some occasions during the reporting period, local police were slow to prevent the harassment of non-Orthodox religious groups, including members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, and Pentecostals. Some politicians used the supremacy of the GOC in their

platforms and criticized some Protestant groups, particularly evangelical groups, as subversive. Jehovah's Witnesses in particular were the targets of their derogatory comments.

A 2001 Supreme Court ruling revoking the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses, on the grounds that the law does not allow for registration of religious organizations, continues to restrict the group's ability to rent premises for services and import literature. The revocation resulted from a 1999 court case brought by former M.P. Sharadze seeking to ban the group on the grounds that it presented a threat to the State and the GOC. Although the Supreme Court emphasized that its ruling was based on technical legal grounds and was not to have the effect of banning the group, many local law enforcement officials interpreted the Supreme Court's ruling as a ban and have used it as a justification not to protect members of Jehovah's Witnesses from attacks by religious extremists. A case brought by Jehovah's Witnesses before the European Court of Human Rights challenging this annulment was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In April 2004, the Jehovah's Witnesses filed an application to build a place of worship on land they own in Telavi and were denied, because according to local authorities, the neighbors disliked them. The Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the decision, but an agreement was reached out of court. The Jehovah's Witnesses were given construction permission and they dropped their appeal. Construction has begun and should be completed by November. In early 2004, they were also denied use of a newly constructed Kingdom Hall in Samtredia. By the end of the year, they reached an agreement with the Government that once the group demolished an adjacent previously used building, which was in a hazardous condition, the Government would allow use of the new building.

On April 1, 2005, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses requested permission to use the Sports Palace in Tbilisi for a two-day religious convention for up to 5,000 persons. On April 18, the management of the Sports Palace responded that they would only be willing to accommodate such a convention if Jehovah's Witnesses obtained a guarantee from the State to provide security. Private companies usually provide security for such events, and representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses complained that it was an excessive demand and discriminatory to require them to apply to the state to provide security. Instead, the Jehovah's Witnesses held the conference without disturbance on their own property in Marneuli.

In November 2004, students at a State Religious Seminary wrote an open letter in which they accused the GOC of corruption. Subsequently, the Seminary's rector expelled some of the students. Members of the conservative Orthodox group "The Society of Saint David the Builder" assaulted several of these students. The students also attempted to register a nongovernmental organization (NGO) to defend the human rights of religious groups, but the Isani-Samgori district court in Tbilisi denied their request. According to the court's decision, it considered the NGO a religious organization and current law did not allow religious organizations to register as private entities.

In the past, customs and police officials sometimes seized literature of nontraditional religions, particularly that of the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, since January 2004 there have been no reported cases of seized literature or importation difficulties.

All public schools offered a course on religion, which exclusively taught the theology of Orthodox Christianity. While the course was elective, there was societal pressure for all students to take the course. The Patriarchate reportedly had exclusive influence over the course's material and local Orthodox Priests directed, and sometimes taught, the courses in several schools.

During the period covered by this report, students complained that teachers began most courses, including mathematics and science, by leading the class in a recitation of Orthodox prayers. Those who did not participate, including Muslim students, were sometimes punished. In many classrooms, teachers hung orthodox icons or pictures of Georgian Orthodox religious figures. Some schools reportedly have Orthodox chapels where students are encouraged to pray.

The GOC routinely reviews religious and other textbooks used in schools for consistency with Orthodox beliefs. Suggestions by the Church are almost always incorporated into textbooks prior to issue. By law, the Church has a consultative role in curriculum development but no veto power.

On January 22, 2005, the Ministry of Education and the Patriarchate of the GOC signed a joint memorandum reaffirming their cooperation in the field of education. The Memorandum created a joint working group to develop curriculum, choose teachers, and publish material for teaching Orthodox Christianity. In the memorandum, the Ministry agreed to financially assist the Church in its education

projects and institutions and to include the Church in the development of new material for religious education. No other religious groups were afforded these privileges.

On April 7, 2005, the Ministry of Education of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara and the head bishop of the Ajarian Eparchy of the GOC signed an agreement of cooperation. According to the agreement, the Ajarian Government committed itself to provide assistance, including financing, to the GOC in Ajara and to establish joint pre-school and general education institutions. The government promised to include the Church in the preparation of teachers for religious history courses in public schools. No other religious groups were afforded these privileges.

The Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches have been unable to secure the return of churches and other facilities closed during the Soviet period, many of which later were given to the Georgian Orthodox Church by the State. The prominent Armenian church in Tbilisi, Norashen, remained closed, as did four other smaller Armenian churches in Tbilisi and one in Akhaltsikhe. In addition, the Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches, as with Protestant denominations, have had difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches due to pressure from the GOC.

The Jewish community also experienced delays in the return of property confiscated during Soviet rule. By the end of the period covered by this report, a theater group still had not vacated the central hall of a former synagogue that the Government rented to it, despite a 2001 Supreme Court ruling instructing it to do so.

The Government of Georgia does not exercise authority over South Ossetia, nor over the separatist-controlled and unrecognized "Republic of Abkhazia;" therefore, regular and reliable information is difficult to obtain. Abkhaz "President" Vladislav Ardzinba's 1995 decree banning Jehovah's Witnesses in the region remains in effect, but is not enforced. During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported no problems in Abkhazia, where membership is approximately 1,500. Although Baptists, Lutherans, and Catholics also report they are allowed to operate in Abkhazia, the GOC reports it is unable to operate there. The Patriarch has expressed concern over Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) support of separatism in the region by subsidizing web sites that encourage secessionist sentiments. The GOC has also complained that in addition to encouraging separatism, the Moscow Theological Seminary is training Abkhaz priests. Despite the fact that the ROC recognizes Georgia-Abkhazia territorial integrity, the GOC Patriarchy claims that the ROC is sending in priests loyal to Moscow, under the pretext of setting up indigenous Abkhaz churches.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While there were fewer physical attacks on religious minority groups during the reporting period, harassment continued. Although police rarely facilitated harassment of religious minority groups, they sometimes denied protection to these groups. The Catholic Church continued to face difficulties in attempting to build churches in the towns of Kutaisi, Akhaltsikhe, Chiatura, and Ozurgeti. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and Procuracy did not aggressively pursue criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their attacks against religious minorities.

From 1999 to 2003, followers of excommunicated Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili (Basilists) engaged in numerous violent attacks on nontraditional religious minorities, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and especially Jehovah's Witnesses. On January 31, 2005, Basil Mkalavishvili was sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment, and two other colleagues also received prison sentences. Mkalavishvili's lawyers appealed this sentence, but the appeal was pending by the end of the reporting period. During the reporting period, no other criminal cases were commenced. Many acts of religious violence between 2000 and 2003 have gone unpunished, despite the filing of numerous criminal complaints.

There was sporadic harassment of members of nontraditional religions. Occasionally, local Orthodox priests and their congregation members verbally and physically threatened members of minority groups and prevented them from constructing places of worship and from holding worship services. Representatives of religious minority groups regularly filed complaints with the General Prosecutor and Ombudsman, but law enforcers rarely investigated the perpetrators.

In October 2004, a local Orthodox priest and members of his congregation in the eastern village of Velistsikhe verbally and physically threatened a local Baptist deacon, and prevented him from continuing construction on a Baptist church. No criminal investigation was opened.

An investigation into the June 2003 arson attack on a Baptist Church in Akhalsopheli remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In April, Parliament passed an amendment to the Civil Code allowing for the registration of religious organizations as private entities, giving them previously unobtainable legal status. While many religious groups praised the legislation, representatives of more traditional religions continued to push for special legal status that would set them apart from non-traditional religions. Some religious groups also complained that the amendment did not make provisions for registering property that religious groups already owned under personal titles. The Legal Committee agreed to hold consultations to help religious groups overcome this hurdle.

In contrast to previous years, no religious group reported difficulties importing literature or religious material. In November 2004, the Jehovah's Witnesses received their final shipment previously confiscated at customs and have since reported no problems in this regard. Jehovah's Witnesses also no longer feel the need to hold their services in private homes for security reasons, but have resumed meeting openly in their Kingdom Halls.

In April, Parliament passed a new law on general education. The law forbids the display of religious symbols on a public school's grounds unless the purpose is academic. The law also forbids religious indoctrination, proselytizing, forced assimilation, or the teaching of theology in public schools during school hours. Students are allowed to study religion and conduct religious rituals after school hours, but neither a teacher nor any other outside party, such as a priest, may participate unless invited by the students. Prayers and other rituals may no longer be conducted during school hours.

In October 2004, the Government paid Jehovah's Witness Mirian Arabidze compensation for moral damages concerning a wrongful conviction in 2001 that stemmed from attacks by followers of defrocked Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili.

In October 2004, the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the Russian-language Pentecostal congregation headed by Pastor Nikolai Kalutski. In 2003, protestors blockaded Kalutski's home in Tbilisi for several weeks to prevent his congregation from attending worship services. In response, local police banned the use of the private home for religious services. The Constitutional Court ruled that the congregation's rights had been violated by the police ban and ordered the police to protect the congregation from neighbors' and others' threats. Since then, the police have been relatively responsive in protecting the congregation. However, in April and May, in the face of continued neighbor protests, the Ombudsman agreed to help the congregation find a more suitable worship place. The Ministry of Justice has since begun consultations with the congregation to this end.

On January 31, defrocked Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili was sentenced to six years imprisonment for inciting and conducting religiously motivated violence. His colleagues Petre Ivanidze and Merab Koroshinadze were sentenced to four and one year prison terms, respectively.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The public's attitude towards religion is ambivalent, according to numerous public opinion polls. Although many residents are not particularly observant, the link between the country's Orthodoxy and ethnic and national identity is strong.

Relations between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims are very good. Since the fall of 1996, Sunni and Shi'a have worshipped together in Tbilisi's mosque. Relations between Muslims and Christians are also quite good. Despite occasional media reports of minor incidents of violence between ethnic Azeris and ethnic Georgians or ethnic Armenians, these do not appear to be motivated by religious differences.

There are few problems between religious minority groups. In April 2004, Muslims and Lutherans united to build a sports stadium in the Dmanisi District. Construction was finished later in the year and the stadium has been open for public use since that time.

In September 2004, an ecumenical memorial service was held for the victims of the terrorist attack in Beslan, southern Russia and for the victims of the terrorist attack at New York's World Trade Center. Representatives from most Protestant de-

nominations and from the Muslim and Jewish faiths participated. On February 4, 2005 a multi-faith service was held in Tbilisi. Leaders from the Armenian Apostolic, Baptist, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic Churches attended. Reportedly, imprisoned defrocked Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili participated in the service by cellular phone.

The Jewish communities reported that they have encountered few societal problems. There was no historical pattern of anti-Semitism in the country, nor were there any reported incidents during the period covered by this report.

The Patriarch of the GOC invited several representatives from religious minorities to participate in the November 2004 opening of the national cathedral. After the ceremonies, the Patriarch invited these representatives to his residence, where he gave them each a gift of wine to thank them for their participation. Participants included those religious minorities who signed the 2002 Concordat between the GOC and the Government, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Baptist Church of Georgia, Muslim representatives, and Jewish representatives. Non-signatories were not invited.

Despite their genuine and historical tolerance toward minority religious groups traditional to the country—including Catholics, Armenian Apostolic Christians, Jews, and Muslims—many citizens remain apprehensive about Protestants and other nontraditional religions, which they often view as taking advantage of the populace's economic hardship by gaining membership through economic assistance to converts. Many members of the GOC and the public view religious minorities, especially nontraditional groups of evangelical Protestants or so-called "sects," as a threat to the national Church and the country's cultural values. In response to a June 2005 survey conducted by a reputable polling organization, 73 percent responded that Jehovah's Witnesses create serious problems for society and 87 percent felt the group should be banned.

During the year, there were several incidents of harassment directed towards non-traditional religious groups, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses. In July 2004 in Ozurgeti, an employee of the local Mayor's office verbally and physically threatened two representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses who were proselytizing door-to-door. Although the victims filed a complaint with the local Prosecutor's Office and Mayor's Office, no charges were brought. In November 2004, a Jehovah's Witness representative was threatened several times for using his house to hold worship services in Kareli. In one incident, unknown persons broke the door to his house and stole a tape recorder. In June 2005, renovations to a Jehovah's Witnesses' meeting house in Kutaisi were halted due to attacks by angry neighbors. Victims in the attacks have filed criminal complaints with authorities and an investigation is underway. These attacks were accompanied by specific verbal threats against the Jehovah's Witnesses clearly motivated by 'not in my back yard' sentiments. At about the same time as the attacks at the renovation site, the Jehovah's Witnesses conducted a regular congress in Kutaisi without incident.

In 2003, in the Merve Polki region, Besik Gazdeliani verbally and physically assaulted a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. Although complaints were filed with authorities, including the Prosecutor General's office and the Ombudsman, no action was taken to hold him responsible. In 2003 in Senaki, approximately 40 persons reportedly verbally and physically assaulted several Jehovah's Witnesses. The attackers confiscated religious literature and personal belongings of the victims. After a complaint was filed with the Prosecutor General and the Ombudsman, authorities began a preliminary investigation, which ended soon after when they decided not to initiate a case.

On September 12, 2004, several local residents verbally and physically threatened a group of Russian Pentecostals attempting to hold services in a private house in Tbilisi. The pastor called the police, who arrived promptly to control the crowd. According to the pastor, although police came to the residence to investigate allegations on three occasions, they asked him not to file an official statement about the incident. On April 28, an Orthodox group came to the residence and again physically and verbally threatened the congregation. Police arrived to provide a safe cordon for congregation members to enter the house, and hold services. The Ombudsman also came to avert violence. Participants complained that the Pentecostal services were disruptive, to which the Ombudsman agreed to assist the Pentecostal congregation to find a new building for services. Nevertheless, on May 13, the congregation again held services in the house and protestors again came and verbally and physically harassed congregation members. Again the police came to protect the congregation. The Ministry of Interior opened a criminal investigation into these incidents.

In October 2004, local citizens vandalized a Baptist pastor's house in the eastern village of Kuchatani, which was used for worship services. That same month, in the

southern town of Bolnisi, the front door of a Lutheran church was vandalized and written threats were posted to the door.

In March 2005, in the city of Rustavi, neighbors threatened to burn down the Seventh-day Adventists' worship hall if they held a planned conference. When representatives of the Adventists reported these threats to the police, the police did not react; they then addressed the Liberty Institute, which intervened with the police on their behalf. The police then agreed to prevent any disturbance during their planned conference. During the one-day conference, a woman entered the church and verbally harassed the congregation. The next day, reporters from the television channel Rustavi 2 came to the worship hall to report on the incident. In the televised report, which portrayed Adventists in a negative light, GOC Priest Zurab Tskhovrebadze warned locals against Adventists and implied that the religion was not Christian. Subsequent newspaper articles falsely attacked the Adventists' humanitarian organization for indoctrinating children with anti-Orthodox beliefs.

Local Orthodox priests and public school teachers vocally criticized minority religions and interfaith marriages. Some also discouraged Orthodox followers from any interaction with students who belonged to Protestant churches. Sometimes teachers ridiculed students who had converted to Protestant faiths, claiming the students converted because they were offered financial benefits.

The GOC withdrew its membership from the World Council of Churches in 1997 in order to appease clerics strongly opposed to ecumenism. The Patriarchy of the GOC has strongly criticized the attacks perpetrated by Orthodox extremists against nontraditional religious minorities and has distanced itself from Mkalavishvili. However, some Orthodox Church officials have had ties to the Jvari organization, which has committed numerous acts of violence against religious minorities. During the period covered by this report, Jvari became less active, whereas the fundamentalist Orthodox society named the Society of Saint David the Builder became more active and vocal against religious minorities and against tolerance within the Orthodox Church.

Many problems among traditional religious groups stem from property disputes. The Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches have been unable to secure the return of their churches and other facilities that were closed during the Soviet period, many of which later were given to the GOC by the State. The prominent Armenian church in Tbilisi, Norashen, remains closed, as do four other smaller Armenian churches in Tbilisi and one in Akhaltsikhe. The Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches, as well as Protestant denominations, have had difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches, reportedly in part as a result of pressure from the GOC. GOC authorities have accused Armenian believers of purposely altering some existing Georgian churches so that they would be mistaken for Armenian churches. Armenian representatives accuse Georgian believers of the same activities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government repeatedly raised its concerns regarding harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with senior government officials, including the President, Parliament Speaker, Internal Affairs and Justice Ministers, and the Prosecutor General. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, frequently met with representatives of the Government, Parliament, various religious confessions, and NGOs concerned with religious freedom issues.

Embassy officials attended the trial of defrocked Orthodox Priest Basil Mkalavishvili, including the sentencing hearing in January 2005.

Embassy officials supported and attended a December 2004 conference on religious tolerance and legislation sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and hosted by the Parliament. Embassy officials also encouraged Parliamentarians to support the conference. Embassy officials continued to meet with Parliamentarians to encourage passage of legislation allowing for registration of religious groups. Parliament passed the law in April 2005. Embassy officials encouraged religious minority groups to support the efforts of the State Ombudsman in regards to religious freedom by participating in his roundtables and new initiatives.

In April 2005, the Ambassador attended a reception conducted by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to show gratitude and support for local Jewish communities. In May 2005, the Ambassador attended the reopening of a Baptist

church in Akhalsopeli that was burned down by arsonists in 2003. In June 2005, the Ambassador attended the opening of the Baptist Beteli Social Center in Tbilisi.

GERMANY

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, discrimination against certain religious minorities remains an issue. 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 free practice of religion. As the country's religious demography grew increasingly complex, the generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

Important religious issues of concern included the organization of Islamic religious instruction in schools; social and governmental (federal and state) treatment of certain religious minorities, notably Scientologists and Jehovah's Witnesses; and bans in certain states on the wearing of headscarves by female Muslim teachers in public schools.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government placed particular emphasis on support for direct dialogue between representatives of minority religions and relevant government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 137,847 square miles, and its population is approximately 82 million. There are no official statistics on religions; however, unofficial estimates and figures provided by religious organizations give an approximate breakdown of the membership of the country's denominations. The data below were compiled from various sources and are for 2003 unless otherwise noted.

The Roman Catholic Church had a membership of approximately 26.5 million. The Evangelical Church, a confederation of the Lutheran, Uniata, and Reformed Protestant Churches, has approximately 26.2 million members. Together, these two churches account for two thirds of the population.

Other religious communities comprising more than 0.1 percent of the population are Protestant Christian: New Apostolic Church: 400,000; Ethnic German Baptists from the FSU: 300–380,000; Baptist: 85,000. Muslims number 3.3 million (2001), including Sunnis: 2.2 million (2001); Alawites: 340,000 (2000); Shiites: 170,000 (2000). Orthodox Christian number 1.4 million, including Greek Orthodox/Constantinople Patriarchate: 400,000; Serbian Orthodox: 250,000; Romanian Orthodox: 250,000; Russian Orthodox, Moscow Patriarchate: 100,000.

Buddhists number 210,000, and Jehovah's Witnesses 166,000. Jews number 189,000, including Central Council Affiliated (primarily Orthodox): 105,000 (2004), and non-affiliated: 80,000 (2004). Hindus number 97,500.

Note: Under a liberal immigration policy, more than 199,000 Jews and their dependents from the former Soviet Union (FSU) have come to the country since 1990, with smaller numbers arriving from other countries as well. Not all new arrivals join congregations, resulting in the discrepancy between population and congregation membership. In December 2004 negotiations began between the Government and the Central Council of Jews in Germany that could place new limits on Jewish immigration from the FSU.

An estimated 21 million persons, or a quarter of the population, either have no religious affiliation or belong to unrecorded religious organizations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, discrimination against and unequal treatment of some minority religious groups remain an issue, in part because of the legal/constitutional structure of church-state relations. The structure for managing church-state relations, established in 1949, is gradually adapting to the country's increasingly diverse religious make-up.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the state. However, most religious organizations are registered and treated as nonprofit associations, which enjoy a degree of tax-exempt status. State-level authorities review registration submissions and routinely grant tax-exempt status. Their decisions are subject to judi-

cial review. Organizations must provide evidence, through their own statutes, that they are a religion and thus contribute socially, spiritually, or materially to society. Local tax offices occasionally conduct reviews of tax-exempt status.

Religion and state are separate, although a special partnership exists between the State and those religious communities that have the status of a “corporation under public law.” Any religious organization may request that it be granted “public law corporation” status, which among other things entitles it to name prison, hospital and military chaplains and to levy a tithe (averaging nine percent of income) on its members that the State collects. (Public law corporations pay a fee to the Government for this tax service; not all avail themselves of it.) The decision to grant public law corporation status is made at the state level based on certain requirements, including an assurance of permanence, the size of the organization, and an indication that the organization is not hostile to the constitutional order or fundamental rights. Religious groups that have been granted public law corporation status, in addition to the Evangelical and Catholic Churches, include the Jewish community, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists, Christian Scientists, and the Salvation Army.

The Muslim communities remain an exception. To date, no state has granted any Muslim group public law corporation status, in large measure because of intra-Muslim disputes over which organization can be considered representative of the community as a whole. The federal Government is in principle in favor of granting public law corporation status to Muslim communities but has urged Muslims to agree upon a single organization with which the state and federal governments could deal.

The State provides subsidies to some religious organizations for historical and cultural reasons. Some Jewish synagogues have been built with state financial assistance because of the State’s role in the destruction of synagogues in the Nazi period. Repairs to and restoration of some Christian churches and monasteries expropriated by the state in 1803 are financed by the Government. Newer buildings do not receive subsidies for maintenance. State governments also subsidize various institutions affiliated with public law corporations, such as religious schools and hospitals, which provide public services.

According to the 2003 “State Agreement on Cooperation” between the federal Government and the Central Council of Jews, 3 million euros (approximately \$3.75 million) is provided annually to the Central Council for maintenance of the Jewish cultural heritage and building up the Jewish community, and to support integration and social work. The Central Council reports annually to the Government on the use of the funds. The agreement emphasizes that the Central Council of Jews is meant to support all branches of Judaism with the funds provided. However, the German branch of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) has contested the Central Council’s management of the funds and has sought the assistance of the Government and of the courts in resolving the dispute. The Government has encouraged the parties to reach an agreement, but, citing separation of church and state, has taken no position on the substance of the dispute. The Government also directly supports Jewish institutions and projects with a liberal orientation, including the establishment of a secretariat for the German chapter of the WUPJ.

Most public schools offer Protestant and Catholic religious instruction in cooperation with those churches, and instruction in Judaism, if enough students express interest. Depending on the state, a nonreligious ethics course or study hall may be available for students not wishing to participate in religious instruction. In early 2005, a dispute arose between the state of Berlin and the evangelical and Catholic churches over proposals to establish a mandatory secular ethics course for all students in Berlin public schools. The churches argue that the state should not be responsible for transmitting ethical values and cannot properly teach about the ethical content of religions. Although confessional education would remain on offer in Berlin on a voluntary basis, the churches believe that their teaching would be undermined.

In 2004, providing Islamic education in public schools was a controversial topic nationally. Education is a state responsibility and, because no nation-wide Islamic organization exists that all states recognize as a public law corporation, the form and content of Islamic instruction varies from state to state. Organizations providing Muslim instruction in several states do not have public law corporation status.

Bavaria, in cooperation with the Turkish government, has offered Islamic religious instruction in Turkish in its public schools since the 1980s. Since 2001, in a separate state-initiated and much smaller program, Islamic instruction has been offered in German. In 2003–04, a pilot Islamic education program in German in cooperation with the local Muslim community began at one public school.

Baden-Wuerttemberg will offer Islamic religious courses in select public schools in 2006–07. Local Islamic organizations will be responsible for the religious classes, using a curriculum developed by the state.

Following favorable rulings by courts on the status of the Berlin Islamic Federation as a religious community, the Federation began in 2001 to provide Islamic instruction in several Berlin schools. The decision has drawn criticism from Muslim organizations not represented in the Federation, and from others concerned about the Federation's alleged links to a Turkish group classified as extremist by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC). In June 2005, media reported that the state government was planning to establish a training program for teachers of Islam at the Free University to permit the development of a state-sponsored alternative to the Islamic Federation's program.

In 2003, Lower Saxony began a pilot Islamic instruction program in German in eight elementary schools. The program was developed by the state in collaboration with local Muslim communities. The program was tentatively set to be expanded to additional elementary schools in 2005.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, Islamic instruction began in Turkish in 1999. As of 2004, Islam was taught, through a state-developed curriculum in German, to more than 6,000 students in 110 schools. However, these courses seek to provide objective information about Islam rather than educate students in their faith, as is the case in Protestant and Catholic classes. Efforts are underway to develop such a course in cooperation with Islamic organizations.

One school in Bremen offers instruction in Islam. The new government of Schleswig-Holstein has begun to consider how to introduce Islamic instruction in German. No Islamic instruction is provided in schools in Hamburg as the authorities have suspended an initiative for an interreligious program. In a number of eastern states (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt), the number of Muslim students is too small and dispersed for Islamic instruction to be practicable.

Ministry of Defense efforts to develop a Muslim chaplaincy have failed because of an inability to reach agreement on a plan with the multiple Muslim groups. Independently, the Ministry has developed a code of conduct to facilitate the practice of Islam by an estimated 3,000 Muslim soldiers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

In 2002, the Federal Constitutional Court defined the Government's "warning" function with respect to nontraditional religions, ruling that the Government could characterize nontraditional religions as "sects," "youth religions," and "youth sects," and is allowed to provide accurate information about them to the public. However, the Government may not defame these religions by using terms such as "destructive," "pseudo-religion," or "manipulative."

The Federal Interior Ministry's 1995 immigration exclusion (refusal to issue a visitor's visa) continues in force against the founder of the Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, and his wife, Hak Ja Har Moon. The 1995 decision was based on the Government's characterization of Rev. Moon and his wife as leaders of a "cult" that endangers the personal and social development of young persons. The Unification Church is seeking to overturn the ban in the courts.

A 10-year legal effort by Jehovah's Witnesses to overturn a Berlin state government (Senate) 1995 decision to deny them public law corporation status was still unresolved by the end of the period covered by this report. The Senate had refused to grant the status because the Jehovah's Witnesses' bar on members voting raises questions about its loyalty to the democratic state and because its use of corporal punishment and separation of members leaving the religion from their families raise human rights concerns. However, in March 2005, the Berlin Administrative Court ruled for a second time that Berlin had not proven its case and ordered the Senate to grant the status. The Senate advised in April 2005, that it was awaiting the written judgment before making a decision on next steps.

In 2004, the Church of Scientology, which operates 18 churches and missions, remained under observation (as it has been since 1997) by the federal and seven state Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (OPCs), out of concern that the Church's teachings and practices are opposed to the democratic constitutional order or violate human rights. In deciding whether to observe an organization, OPC officials collect publicly available information, mostly from written materials and from public events, to assess whether a "threat" exists. In addition, OPC staff and law enforcement officials have also directly approached Scientologists for information, a practice many find intimidating and a form of harassment. More intrusive observa-

tion methods are subject to legal checks and would require evidence of involvement in treasonous or terrorist activity.

In November 2004, a Cologne court ruled that such observation was justified and could continue. The Church of Scientology has appealed the decision. In April 2005, a Saarland court ruled that the state OPC could not include Scientology in its annual report if no negative information was found. In practice, over the last three years, an increasing number of state OPCs have opted to stop their observation of Scientology. Policy and practice vary widely among the states and the disparity appears to be increasing as many states move away from the stringent practices still followed in Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria. Nevertheless, the federal OPC's 2005 annual report concluded that the original reasons for initiating observation of Scientology in 1997 remained valid, although it noted that Scientology had not been involved in any criminal activity. Scientologists contend that OPC observation is harmful to the Church's reputation and continue to seek redress through the courts.

Several states have published pamphlets about Scientology (and other religions) that detail the Church's ideology and practices. States defend the practice by noting their responsibility to respond to citizens' requests for information about Scientology as well as other issues. While many of the pamphlets are factual and relatively unbiased, some warn of alleged dangers posed by Scientology to the political order, the free market economic system, and to the mental and financial well being of individuals.

Beyond the Government's actions, the Catholic Church and, especially, the Evangelical Church have been public opponents of Scientology. Evangelical "sect commissioners" have been particularly active in this regard.

In response to concerns about Scientology's ideology and practices, government agencies at the federal and state level and private sector entities have established rules and procedures that discriminate against Scientology as an organization and/or against individual members of the Church. For example, since 2001, the federal government has prohibited firms bidding on government training contracts from using the "technology of L. Ron Hubbard" (a proprietary term used by the Church of Scientology) in executing contracts. Firms owned, managed by, or employing Scientologists could, however, bid on contracts. Some states and private business groups have adopted variations, in some cases more stringent, of this rule. Private groups have also on occasion required foreign firms that wished to do business in the country to declare any affiliation that they or their employees may have with Scientology.

Since 1996, government employment offices throughout the country have implemented an Economics and Labor Ministry administrative order directing them to enter an "S" notation next to the names of firms suspected of employing Scientologists. Employment counselors are supposed to warn their clients that they might encounter Scientologists in these workplaces. Some private job centers have also adopted this practice. Scientologists have claimed that the "S" notations violate their right to privacy and interfere with their livelihood.

In 2004, Scientologists continued to report instances of societal discrimination. According to Scientologists, when the Ministry of Trade and Commerce of Baden Wuerttemberg learned in October 2004 that the winner of the "Baden Wuerttemberg Support Prize for Young Companies" had been awarded to a Scientologist, the Ministry withdrew the prize of approximately \$20,250 (15,000 euros). In Hamburg, the city refused to renew a Scientology lease of exhibition space, reportedly following complaints from citizens about the Church's aggressive recruitment activities.

Since the 1990s, four of the major political parties—the Christian Democratic Union, the Christian Social Union, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP)—have banned Scientologists from party membership. Scientologists have unsuccessfully challenged these bans in courts.

After 2003, the Federal Constitutional Court cleared the way for state legislation that would ban female Muslim teachers from wearing headscarves at work; several states indicated their intention to enact laws prohibiting Muslim public servants from wearing headscarves on duty. From April 2004 to January 2005, six states passed such legislation; four states were considering draft laws, and no action had been taken in five states. New legislation generally used language that could be applied to wearing any symbol that could be taken as a rejection of constitutional values or as a symbol of oppression. At least in the case in Baden Wuerttemberg, this legislation is now under judicial review.

In October 2004, a Leipzig court ruled that Christian nuns teaching in public schools (a common practice) must obey a Baden Wuerttemberg law which prohibits the wearing of religious paraphernalia in schools. In November 2004, Bavaria banned headscarves and other religious symbols deemed contrary to constitutional

order; however, it did not ban the wearing of crucifixes or nuns' habits, claiming that they were professional uniforms.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The country is becoming increasingly secular and, at the same time, religiously diverse. Regular attendance at religious services is decreasing. Fifteen years after reunification, the eastern part of the country remains far more secular than the west. Only 5 to 10 percent of eastern citizens belong to a religious organization.

A degree of traditional anti-Semitism based on religious doctrines and anti-Jewish prejudices continued to exist.

According to the 2005 report by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the total number of registered anti-Semitic crimes rose slightly from 1,199 in 2003 to 1,316 in 2004. Among these, the number of violent crimes increased from 35 to 37, although the number of desecrations of Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, and memorials declined from 113 to 101. Desecration of Jewish cemeteries or other monuments was the most widespread anti-Semitic act. In December 2004, billboards advertising the campaign against forgetting the Holocaust were defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti and slogans supporting a neo-Nazi organization. However, there were reports of personal violence, as in Frankfurt in August 2004, when a member of the Orthodox community was attacked and knocked to the ground by four men shouting, "They forgot to send your parents to the gas chamber."

Frankfurt's Jewish community harshly criticized anti-Semitism on the part of some Islamic representatives at the October 2004 Frankfurt Book Fair. Jewish representatives cited open displays of anti-Semitic texts, such as the book "Terror and Zionist Thinking."

Nine members of the Kameradschaft Sued (Southern Brotherhood), a neo-Nazi gang from the southern part of the country, were charged in an alleged 2003 plot to bomb the site of a planned Jewish community center in downtown Munich. The trial of ringleader Martin Wiese and three members of his inner leadership circle began in November 2004. In May 2005, the defendants were sentenced to between 2½ and 7 (Wiese) years' imprisonment. An earlier trial of three teenage girls and two men began in October 2004. In April 2005, the five were given suspended sentences because of their age and cooperation with the prosecution. The prosecution was unable to conclusively prove the bomb plot plans and the group was convicted on the basis of membership in a terrorist organization and illegal possession of weapons.

While most anti-Semitic acts are attributed to neo-Nazi or other extremist groups or persons, recent anti-Semitic incidents indicate that Arab youths are increasingly behind attacks on and harassment of the Jews. Authorities strongly condemned all anti-Semitic acts and devoted significant resources to investigating incidents and prosecuting perpetrators. Authorities run a variety of tolerance-education programs, many focusing on anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The programs receive input and assistance from Jewish nongovernmental organizations. The state also provides 24-hour police protection at synagogues and many other Jewish institutions.

The rise of a substantial Muslim minority has at times led to social conflict with religious, ethnic, and cultural overtones. Commonly, this includes local resistance to the construction of mosques or disagreements over whether Muslims may use loudspeakers in residential neighborhoods to call the faithful to prayer. Authorities argue that many disputes also appear to be related to compliance with construction and zoning laws; private groups (with some Interior Ministry financing) are seeking to better educate Muslim groups about these laws. Muslim groups, however, argue that such rules are often abused or that local opposition is motivated by anti-Muslim bias. Local opposition in Munich has, for example, delayed plans to build a new mosque there. There was an arson attack against a mosque in the Hessian town of Usingen in December 2004, with \$12,500 (10,000 euros) worth of damage done. Authorities believed the attack was the work of an individual, but no arrests were made and no person or group had claimed responsibility for the attack. Islamic instruction in Turkish or Arabic has also come under criticism from politicians and

others who are concerned that such classes may convey anti-constitutional or anti-Western messages.

On several occasions police raided mosques and other Muslim institutions in connection with counter-terrorism investigations. Some raids, such as the July 2004 raid on a Frankfurt mosque, triggered accusations of discrimination from members of the mosque. There also remain areas where the law conflicts with Islamic practices, for example with regard to the call to prayer, Muslim ritual slaughtering, or the segregation of older boys and girls during sports classes.

As noted above, the Evangelical Church employs “sect commissioners” to investigate “sects, cults, and psycho-groups” and to publicize what they consider to be the dangers of these groups to the public. Beyond Scientology, Evangelical sect commissioners are especially active in their efforts to warn the public about alleged dangers posed by the Unification Church, Bhagwan-Osho, and Transcendental Meditation. The printed and Internet literature of the sect commissioners has portrayed these as “totalitarian,” “pseudo-religious,” and “fraudulent.” Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Church of Christ, Christian Scientists, the New Apostolic Church, and the Johannish Church have been characterized in less negative terms but nevertheless are singled out as “sects.” The Catholic Church also employs sect commissioners, who generally restrict their activities to providing counsel to individuals who have questions about “sects.”

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses all aspects of religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, including the status of Islamic education and attitudes toward the Muslim community.

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

The status of Scientology was the subject of many official discussions. The U.S. Government expressed its concerns over infringement of individual rights because of religious affiliation and over the potential for discrimination in international trade posed by the screening of foreign firms for possible Scientology affiliation. Embassy officers at all levels consistently and repeatedly supported Church of Scientology requests for direct dialogue with government officials.

GREECE

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice; however, while the Government generally respects this right, non-Orthodox groups sometimes face administrative obstacles or encounter legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles.

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. Some non-Orthodox citizens have complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 81,935 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10.9 million. Approximately 97 percent of citizens identify themselves at least nominally with the Greek Orthodox faith. There are approximately 500,000 to 800,000 Old Calendarists—ultra-conservative Orthodox—who use the Julian calendar and adhere to traditional Greek Orthodox practice, throughout the country. The Government does not keep statistics on religious groups; censuses do not ask for religious affiliation. Officials estimate the size of the Turcophone Muslim community at 98,000 although other estimates range up to 140,000. Ethnic Greeks are a sizeable percentage of most Christian non-Orthodox denominations. The Jehovah’s Witnesses report having approximately 30,000 active members and 50,000 people af-

filiated with the faith; Members of the Roman Catholic faith are estimated at 50,000; Protestants, including evangelicals, at 30,000; and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) at 300. Scientologists report 500 active registered members. The longstanding Jewish community numbers approximately 5,000 adherents; an estimated 2,000 reside in Thessaloniki. Approximately 250 members of the Baha'i Faith, the majority of whom are citizens of non-Greek ethnicity, are scattered throughout the country. Followers of the ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions report 2,000 members. There also are small populations of Anglicans, Baptists, and nondenominational Christians. There is no official or unofficial estimate of atheists.

The majority of non-citizen residents are not Greek Orthodox. The largest group is the Albanians (approximately 700,000 including legal and illegal residents); most Albanians are secular in orientation. Despite such secularism, Albanians traditionally associate themselves with the Muslim, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic faiths. Aside from the indigenous Muslim minority in Thrace, the Muslim immigrant population in the rest of the country is estimated at 200,000 to 300,000.

Roman Catholics reside primarily in Athens and on the islands of Syros, Tinos, Naxos, and Corfu, as well as in the cities of Thessaloniki and Patras. Immigrants from the Philippines, Poland, and Iraq also practice Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic immigrant population is estimated to be 200,000. The Bishop of Athens heads the Roman Catholic Holy Synod.

Some religious groups, such as the Greek evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses, consist almost entirely of ethnic Greeks and some Russian and Albanian immigrants. Other groups, such as Mormons and Anglicans, consist of an approximately equal number of ethnic Greeks and non-Greeks.

The indigenous Muslim community, concentrated in Thrace with small communities in Rhodes, Kos, and Athens, is composed mainly of Turcophones but also includes Roma and Pomaks, a Slav-origin linguistic minority. A growing number of Muslim immigrants live in Athens and in rural areas.

Scientologists and followers of the ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions, most of whom are located in the Athens area, practice their faith through registered non-profit civil law organizations.

Foreign missionary groups in the country, including Protestants and Mormons, are active; the Mormons state that they sponsor approximately 80 missionaries in the country each year.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as the prevailing religion, and provides for freedom of religion. However, while the Government generally respects this right, non-Orthodox groups sometimes face administrative obstacles or encounter legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles. The Orthodox Church exercises significant political and economic influence. The Government, under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Religion, provides some financial support. For example, the Government pays for the salaries and religious training of clergy, and finances the maintenance of Orthodox Church buildings. The Government also passed taxation legislation in 2004 that gradually abolishes by 2007 tax on revenues for Greek Orthodox Churches and institutions. While this appears to preferentially benefit the Greek Orthodox Church, leaders of other faiths reported that such laws typically refer only to the Greek Orthodox Church. Upon judicial examination, the laws are usually applied to all churches; however this practice presents unnecessary administrative obstacles for non-Orthodox churches.

In 2005, a series of scandals alleging the theft of antiquities, trial-fixing, and other illegal and immoral behavior by high-ranking Greek Orthodox clerics shook the powerful Orthodox Church. The scandals renewed discussion in the media of a separation of church and state.

In 2001, the Government added a conscientious objector provision to the Constitution. A government ombudsman office provided an effective means for citizens to resolve human rights and religious freedom problems. The office was granted adequate resources to perform its functions and was widely recognized. These two developments helped foster government tolerance of minority religions.

The Orthodox Church, Judaism, and Islam are the only groups considered to be "legal persons of public law." Other religions are considered "legal persons of private law." In practice, the primary distinction is that the Civil Code's provisions pertaining to corporations regulate the establishment of "houses of prayer" for religions

besides the Orthodox Church, Judaism, or Islam. For example, other religions cannot own property as religious entities; the property must belong to a specifically created legal entity rather than to the religious body itself. In practice, this places an additional legal and administrative burden on other religious community organizations, although in most cases this process has been handled routinely. Members of religious groups that are classified as private entities cannot be represented in court as religious entities and cannot bequeath or inherit property as a religious entity. The law extended legal recognition as a private entity to Roman Catholic churches and related entities established prior to 1946. By virtue of the Orthodox Church's status as the prevailing religion, the Government recognizes the Orthodox Church's canon law, both within the church and in such areas of civil law as marriage. The Catholic Church unsuccessfully has sought government recognition of its canon law since 1999.

Two laws from the 1930s require recognized or "known" religious groups to obtain "house of prayer" permits from the Ministry of Education and Religion to open houses of worship. No formal mechanism exists to gain recognition as a known religion. By law, the Ministry may base its decision to issue permits on the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop. Documentation provided by Scientology representatives, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Greek Orthodox Church indicates the Government does consult with local bishops in some cases. The involvement of bishops in the house of prayer permit process has given rise to some problems; there are three pending cases in which local Orthodox bishops have reportedly appealed to the Council of State, the highest administrative court, to annul house of prayer permits for Jehovah's Witness houses of worship in Halkidiki and Serres.

According to the Ministry's officials, applications for additional houses of prayer are numerous and are approved routinely; however, Scientologists have not been able to register or build a house of prayer. A group which follows the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition applied twice in the last three years for a house of prayer permit but has not received an official response to its applications, despite advice from the ombudsman to the Ministry of Education and Religion to respond to its requests. The Jehovah's Witnesses have had five house of prayer permit requests pending since May 2004. Additionally, non-Orthodox religious groups must provide separate and lengthy applications to authorities on such matters as gaining permission to move an official house of prayer to a larger facility.

Leaders of some non-Orthodox religious groups claimed that all taxes on religious organizations are discriminatory, even those that the Orthodox Church has to pay, because the Government subsidizes the Orthodox Church, while other groups are self-supporting.

Muslim religious leaders say there are approximately 375 mosques in Thrace. The Government pays the salaries of the two official Muslim religious leaders, or "muftis," and the salaries of approximately 20 out of 130 imams. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne gives Muslims in Thrace the right to maintain social and charitable organizations called "wakfs" and allows muftis to render religious judicial services in the area of family law.

The Lausanne Treaty provides the Turcophone Muslim minority with the right to Turkish-language education, and provides a reciprocal entitlement for the Greek minority in Istanbul (less than 3,000 persons). Western Thrace has secular Turkish-language bilingual schools and two Qur'anic schools funded by the state. As of 2004, approximately 7,000 Muslim students are enrolled in Turkish bilingual grammar schools and 953 attend minority high schools. Another 280 students, many of whom become schoolteachers, attend the Islamic schools. The majority of Thrace Muslim students, approximately 3,650, attend public secondary schools which are deemed better preparation for Greek-language universities.

Special consideration is given to Thrace Muslims for admission to technical institutes and universities that set aside 0.5 percent of the total number of places for them annually. Approximately 900 Thrace Muslim students take advantage of this affirmative action program; a small number choose to attend university in Turkey. In April 2005, the Minister of Education announced that ten full scholarships for the academic year 2005–2006 would be offered for Muslim students who will enter universities.

The Government maintains that Muslims outside Thrace are not covered by the Treaty of Lausanne and therefore do not enjoy those rights provided by the Treaty. Muslim parents complain that hundreds of Turcophone children in the Athens area do not receive remedial Greek instruction, other than in one multicultural elementary education "pilot school."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 2000, the Ministry of Education and Religion rejected the application of the Scientologists for recognition and a house of prayer permit on the grounds that Scientology "is not a religion." The Church of Scientology is registered as a non-profit organization because the group's legal counsel advised that the Government would not recognize Scientology as a religion.

Minority religious groups have requested that the Government abolish laws regulating house of prayer permits, which are required to open houses of worship. Local police have the authority to bring to court minority churches that operate or build places of worship without a permit.

In May 2004, Nikodim Tsarknias, a former Greek Orthodox priest who is now a priest of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, was sentenced to three months in prison by the Aridea Criminal Court of First Instance on charges of establishing and operating a church without authorization after he held Macedonian Orthodox religious services without a house of prayer permit. The jail sentence was under appeal at the end of the period covered by this report.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties in dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Greek Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions. Non-Orthodox religious organizations must provide separate and lengthy applications to government authorities on such matters as gaining permission to move places of worship to larger facilities. In contrast, Greek Orthodox officials have an institutionalized link between the church hierarchy and the Ministry of Education and Religion to handle administrative matters.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses are recognized as a "known" religion, members continued to face some harassment during the period covered by this report in the form of arbitrary identity checks, (although this problem has abated) and local officials' resistance to construction of places of worship. A decision on an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses regarding a property dispute over taxation rates involving their officially recognized headquarters remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In the past, several religious denominations, including Mormons and Jews, reported difficulty in renewing the visas of some non-EU citizen ministers and rabbis because the Government does not have a distinct religious workers' visa category. As part of obligations under the Schengen arrangement, all non-EU citizens face a more restrictive visa and residence regime than they did in the past.

Non-Orthodox citizens have claimed that they face career limits within the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and the civil service because of their religions. In the military, generally only members of the Orthodox faith become officers, leading some members of other faiths to declare themselves Orthodox. Few Muslim military personnel have advanced to the rank of reserve officer, and there were reports of pressure exerted on Greek Orthodox military personnel not to marry in the religious ceremony of non-Orthodox partners, which might cause them to be passed over for promotion.

Muslim citizens are underrepresented in public sector employment and in state-owned industries and corporations. While partly due to the education level of the available applicant pool, activists blame lack of transparency in the civil service hiring process and endemic discrimination. Muslims claim they are generally hired for lower level positions. One Turcophone Muslim currently holds a seat in Parliament. In Xanthi and Komotini, Muslims hold seats on the prefectural and town councils and serve as local mayors. Thrace municipalities hire Muslims as public liaisons in citizen service centers and provide Turkish lessons for other civil servants.

Unlike in Thrace, the growing Muslim community in Athens (composed primarily of economic migrants from South Asia, the Middle East and a small portion of Thrace Muslims and estimated by local press and experts to be between 200,000 and 300,000) still does not have an official mosque or any official cleric to officiate at religious functions, including funerals. Press reports in 2004 claimed that the number of unofficial prayer rooms in Athens ranged from 25 to 70. Members of the Muslim community must use the official Muslim clerics in Thrace for official religious rites. Some Muslims in Athens and other cities travel to Thrace for wedding ceremonies and some transport their deceased there for religious burials; some who cannot afford to travel to Thrace must have unrecognized religious rites performed.

Although the Parliament approved a bill in 2000 allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in the Athens suburb of Peania, construction had not started by the end of the period covered by this report. The Archbishop of Greece and members of the Orthodox Church have made public their opposition to the cultural center, claiming it may "spread the ideology of Islam and the Arab world" and "serve as a breeding ground for terrorism" rather than as a simple cul-

tural center. On a more practical level, local authorities in Peania have opposed the mosque and cultural center's location because there are less than a dozen Muslims in their community. Representatives of Muslim communities have complained that the proposed mosque and cultural center location is too far—at least 40 minutes' drive—from central Athens neighborhoods where many Muslim migrants live to be practical.

In May 2005, approximately 500 Old Calendarists staged a demonstration in Athens to protest a meeting of the World Council of Churches, the proposed Islamic cultural center, the use of credit cards and bar codes, and the influence of the EU.

Differences remain within the Turcophone Muslim community and between segments of the community and the Government regarding the means of selecting muftis. Under existing law, the Government appoints two muftis and one assistant mufti, all resident in Thrace. The Government argued that it must appoint the muftis, as is the practice in Muslim countries, because in addition to religious duties, they perform judicial functions under Muslim religious law, for which the State pays them. Hence the Government selects a committee of Turcophone Muslim notables, which recommends candidates for the 10-year terms of office. Some Muslims accept the authority of the two government-appointed muftis; other Muslims have "elected" two muftis to serve their communities since they maintain that the government of a non-Muslim country cannot appoint muftis. There is no established procedure or practice for these non-governmental elections, and the Government does not recognize the "elected" muftis.

The Government recognizes Shari'a (the Muslim religious law) as the law regulating family and civic issues of the Muslim minority in Thrace. The First Instance Courts in Thrace routinely ratify decisions of the Muftis who have judicial powers on civic and domestic matters. The National Human Rights Committee, an autonomous human rights body that is the Government's advisory organ on protection of human rights, has stated that the Government should limit the powers of the muftis to religious duties, and should stop recognizing sharia law, because it restricts civic rights of Muslim Greek citizens. There are underage marriages among Muslims, and some may be arranged. There is no evidence that there are forced marriages.

Controversy between the Muslim community and the Government also continues over the management and self-government of the wakfs, particularly regarding the Government's appointment of officials to serve on administrative boards that govern the wakfs and the degree and type of administrative control, which prior to the 1960s was exercised by the Muslim community. In response to objections from some Muslims that the appointment of officials weakened the financial autonomy of the wakfs and violated the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne, a 1996 presidential decree placed the wakfs under the administration of a committee for three years as an interim measure pending resolution of outstanding problems. The interim period has been extended every two years by presidential decree.

While members of missionary faiths report having difficulties with harassment and police detention due to anti-proselytizing laws, they note a marked improvement during the reporting period because of increased training and instruction given to police officers. Church officials express concern that anti-proselytizing laws remain on the books, although such laws no longer seriously hinder their activities.

A law on alternative forms of mandatory national service for religious and ideological conscientious objectors was enacted in 1998 and amended in 2004, and in 2001 the Government added a conscientious objector provision in the Constitution. The law provides that conscientious objectors may, in lieu of mandatory military service, work in state hospitals, or municipal and public services for two times the length of military service minus one month, typically 23 months. Conscientious objector groups generally characterized the legislation as a positive step, but criticized the longer service term as punitive. They also reported that uneven administration of the civilian service in some cases led to poor working conditions, and noted that it would be preferable for the civilian service to be under a civilian administration, rather than under the Ministry of Defense. Parents of three or more children are exempt from military service.

In May 2005, courts in Ioannina and Larissa sentenced two conscientious objectors who refused military service on religious grounds each to suspended sentences of six months imprisonment. Also in May, an Athens court sentenced a conscientious objector to a suspended 24-month sentence for insubordination stemming from a 1979 insubordination charge for refusing military service when there was no alternative civilian service in the country, after which he fled to and was granted political asylum in Germany. Amnesty International condemned the convictions of the three conscientious objectors, who are Jehovah's Witnesses.

Mandatory military service is three months for repatriated Greeks, and five months for repatriated conscientious objectors. Repatriated conscientious objectors

who have in the past completed military service in their country of origin and became conscientious objectors later in their life are ineligible for alternative service and have taken their cases to the courts. One such case of a repatriated Greek who previously served in the Russian military and later became a Jehovah's Witness was heard in April 2005. The conscientious objector was arrested for insubordination for failing to report for military service and was held in pre-trial detention. In a landmark decision, the Military Court of Athens allowed him to apply for alternative civilian service.

Problems also exist with those who become conscientious objectors after they have performed their military service and are placed on reservist lists. These conscientious objectors are not recognized, as there is no legal provision covering those who change their status after having completed military service. Two cases involving such conscientious objectors are pending before the Council of State.

The law prohibits the functioning of private schools in buildings owned by non-Orthodox religious foundations; however, this law is not enforced in practice.

Orthodox religious instruction in public, primary, and secondary schools is mandatory for all Orthodox students. Non-Orthodox students are exempt from this requirement, however schools offer no alternative supervision for the children during the period of religious instruction; hence these children sometimes attend Orthodox religious instruction by default. Members of the Muslim community in Athens are lobbying for Islamic religious instruction for their children.

In the past, Muslim activists have complained that the Government regularly lodges tax liens against the wakfs, although they are tax-free foundations in theory. Under a national land and property registry law that entered into full effect in 1999, the wakfs, along with all property holders, must register all of their property with the Government. The law permits the Government to seize any property that the owners are not able to document; there are built-in reporting and appeals procedures. The wakfs were established in 1560; however, because of the destruction of files during the two world wars, the wakfs are unable to document ownership of much of their property. Because they have not registered the property, they cannot pay assessed taxes. The Government had not sought to enforce either the assessments or the registration requirement by the end of the period covered by this report.

Because the Greek Orthodox Church does not allow cremation, it remains unavailable in the country. Buddhist citizens have claimed that the lack of cremation as an available means of burial infringes on their religious rights. Citizens who wish to be cremated must be shipped at significant cost to Bulgaria or other countries.

The dispute over religious autonomy between Esphigmenou monastery on Mt. Athos and the Ecumenical Patriarchate that administers the region, continued. Esphigmenou is an Old Calendarist monastery that does not recognize the authority of the Patriarchate. In March 2005, the Council of State upheld a 2002 eviction request by the Ecumenical Patriarchate against the abbot of Esphigmenou on the grounds that it was not competent to judge the administrative jurisdiction of the Patriarchate over Mt. Athos. Approximately ninety similar appeals by other Esphigmenou monks are still pending. Religious authorities continue to claim that they would prefer to settle this dispute out of court.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Some non-Orthodox religious leaders report that their permanent members (non-missionaries) do not encounter discriminatory treatment. However, police regularly detain Mormons (primarily from outside the EU who are undergoing the protracted residence permit process), on average once every three months, usually after receiving complaints that the individuals engage in proselytizing. In most cases, these individuals are held for several hours at a police station and then released with no charges filed. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses report that their interaction with the police has improved during the reporting period due to increased training and instruction given to police officers. Two Jehovah's Witnesses were tried and acquitted in 2004 on proselytism charges. There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees apart from the problems of temporary police detention experienced by Mormons.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religious affiliation is very closely linked to ethnicity. Many attribute the preservation of national identity to the actions of the Greek Orthodox Church during approximately 400 years of Ottoman rule and the subsequent nation-building period. The Church exercises significant social, political, and economic influence and it owns a considerable, although undetermined, amount of property.

Many Greeks assume any ethnic Greek is also an Orthodox Christian. Some non-Orthodox citizens have complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

Members of minority faiths have reported incidents of societal discrimination, such as local Orthodox bishops warning parishioners not to visit clergy or members of minority faiths, and requesting that the police arrest missionaries for proselytizing. However, with the exception of the burgeoning Muslim population, most members of minority faiths consider themselves satisfactorily integrated into society. Organized official interaction between religious communities is infrequent.

Some non-Orthodox religious communities encountered difficulty in communicating with officials of the Orthodox Church and claimed that the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward their faiths has increased social intolerance toward their religions. The Orthodox Church has issued a list of practices and religious groups, including the Jehovah's Witnesses, evangelical Protestants, Scientologists, Mormons, Baha'is, and others, which it believes to be sacrilegious. Officials of the Orthodox Church have acknowledged that they refuse to enter into dialogue with religious groups considered harmful to Orthodox worshippers; church leaders instruct Orthodox Greeks to shun members of these faiths.

While the Orthodox Church of Greece (unlike the Ecumenical Patriarchate) has little interfaith dialogue on local and national levels, it did invite the World Council of Churches to hold an international conference on "World Mission and Evangelism" in Athens in May 2005, that had worldwide representation from all major churches and denominations. The main aim of the conference was "to provide a space for Christians and churches to exchange their experience and think together about priorities in mission and the future of Christian witness."

There were a number of Holocaust commemorative events throughout the country during the period covered by this report. Two new Holocaust monuments were inaugurated, in Arta in July 2004, and in Komotini in May 2005. The Government passed legislation in 2003 establishing January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day, and German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer was the keynote speaker at a national commemorative event in Thessaloniki in 2005. The Ministry of Education distributed materials to schools on the history of the Holocaust to be read in all schools on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

In October 2004, the Government participated in the organization of a seminar on "Teaching the Holocaust." Held under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Education, it addressed 150 educators and Athens University education majors. This teacher-training seminar aimed to introduce Holocaust education in Greek primary and secondary schools. The seminar was organized by and held at the Jewish Museum of Greece in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Taskforce for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education (of which the country is an adjunct but not yet a full member), and the U.S. Embassy.

For the first time, the Jewish Communities of Greece celebrated Chanukah at a public square in Athens in December 2004.

Anti-Semitism continues to exist, particularly in the extremist press. The mainstream press and public often do not clearly distinguish between criticism of Israel and comments about Jews. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Wiesenthal Center, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Greek Helsinki Monitor denounced the Greek press for anti-Semitic articles and cartoons on several occasions in 2004. The Greek Jewish Community has asserted that the line between opposition to Israeli policies and attitudes toward Jews in general is often blurred, giving rise to anti-Semitic sentiment in the media and among the public.

Vandalism of Jewish monuments continued to be a problem during the period covered by this report, although the Government condemned the acts. In Thrace, where the Jewish population was decimated by the Holocaust, a memorial in Drama and a commemorative plaque on the Drama tobacco warehouse where Jews were detained before deportation in 1943 were desecrated in April and May 2004. Swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti were written on the Holocaust Memorial of Komotini in August 2004. Police have been unable to find perpetrators. Anti-Semitic graffiti were spray-painted at several spots along the busy Athens-Corinth highway. Anti-Semitic slogans also reportedly appeared in the Athens suburb of Kifissia and on the island

of Tinos. In 2004, the Wiesenthal Center protested anti-Semitic graffiti on the country's highways and on other public buildings. The extreme right-wing group "Golden Dawn" regularly spray-paints anti-Semitic graffiti on bridges and other structures.

Some schoolbooks still carry negative references to Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition. Some bookstores sold and displayed anti-Semitic literature including the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion."

The Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece, the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee criticized statements of renowned Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis in 2003 and 2004. In 2003, Theodorakis called Jewish persons "the root of evil" but later qualified his statement by saying he had meant to criticize the Government of Israel. Government officials stated that Theodorakis's statements were directed against Israel and not against the Jewish people.

The Anti-Defamation League expressed "shock, anger and disbelief" over the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) awarding of the Olympiart Prize to Theodorakis, who, it said, "did not deserve the Olympic honor" because of his "unrepentant anti-Semitism." The Greek Helsinki Monitor also condemned the IOC's award to Theodorakis because of his anti-Semitic statements.

The June 2004 ECRI report recommended that the Greek authorities closely monitor the situation regarding anti-Semitic acts and statements, and take all necessary awareness-raising and punitive measures to put a stop to these acts. The report points out that Greek public opinion sometimes reflects the prejudices and stereotypes expressed against the Jewish Communities of Greece by the media or public figures. The report continues that while in some cases judicial authorities have taken measures to counter expressions of anti-Semitism, in other cases the criminal law provisions against hate speech have not been applied.

The Popular Orthodox Herald Party (LAOS), a minority party, promotes radical nationalism, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. LAOS leader George Karatzaferis won a seat in the European Parliament in June 2004 elections. Karatzaferis regularly attributes negative events involving the country to international Jewish plots. He used the party-owned television station to denounce Greek politicians with Jewish origins and to claim that Jews were behind the 9/11 attacks.

In November 2004, on one of the last days of Ramadan, as many as 2000 people gathered in protest in a Muslim Pomak village outside the northern city of Xanthi after two inappropriately-clad actresses working on a soap opera sought refuge from the rain in the village mosque. Representatives from the Government and the Greek Orthodox Church noted that the crew did not show adequate respect to a place of worship. Police detained the crew and actors, who were charged with disturbing the peace. Their cases were transferred to Athens, where they are pending. Five residents of the village were also charged with causing damage to the crew's property and the local police station.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officers meet regularly with working-level officials responsible for religious affairs in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education and Religion. The Ambassador and other Mission representatives discussed religious freedom with senior government officials and religious leaders. The U.S. Embassy also regularly discusses religious freedom issues in contacts with other government officials, including mayors, regional leaders, and Members of Parliament. Officers from the Embassy and the Consulate General in Thessaloniki meet regularly with representatives of various religious and minority groups, including the Greek Orthodox Church and the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Islamic, Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Scientology, Baha'i, and ancient polytheistic Hellenic religion communities and solicit their participation in Embassy social events. The Ambassador hosted an Iftar for celebrating Ramadan that was attended by local Muslim leaders and Ambassadors from countries with large Muslim populations. The U.S. Embassy and Consulate General investigate every complaint of religious discrimination brought to their attention.

The Ambassador attended Holocaust commemorations in Thessaloniki and Athens and he and other Embassy officers participated along with the Ministry of Education and the Jewish Museum of Greece in a teacher-training conference on the Holocaust in elementary and secondary schools. The Consulate General continues to monitor the issue of restitution of Jewish properties in Thessaloniki.

The consular section actively follows issues relating to religious workers' visas and property taxes.

The U.S. Embassy and Consulate General promote and support initiatives related to religious freedom. The Embassy and Consulate General uses the International Visitor program to introduce Muslim community leaders to the United States and American counterparts.

The Ambassador and Embassy officials regularly visit religious sites and conduct outreach throughout the country.

HUNGARY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the four “historic religions” (Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Jewish) and certain other denominations, such as Unitarian and Orthodox Churches, enjoy some privileges not available to other faiths.

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. However, several points of friction between the Government and religious organizations arose during the period covered by this report, relating to the Christian churches’ support for the December 2004 dual citizenship referendum, and two recent laws affecting church-run social institutions.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 35,919 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10 million.

Strict enforcement of data protection regulations impedes the collection of official statistics on popular participation in religious life; however, surveys and other evidence suggests that the country’s citizens are less devout than the average European. According to a 2004 survey by the Economic Research Institute of Hungary (GFK), 58 percent of respondents declared themselves to be “believers,” and 55 percent responded that they believe in “God or the super-natural.” Only 15 percent of those believers declared that they go to church at least once a week and 25 percent stated that they never attend church.

The 2001 national census, the latest data available, contained an optional question on religious affiliation, and 90 percent of the population provided a response. According to the census results, 55 percent of citizens are Roman Catholic, 15 percent are members of the Reformed Church, 3 percent are members of the Lutheran Church, and less than 1 percent are Jewish. These four faiths comprise the country’s historic religions. Three percent of respondents identified themselves as Greek Catholics, and 15 percent of respondents declared no religious affiliation. The remaining percentage of the population is divided among a number of other denominations. The largest of these is the Congregation of Faith, a local evangelical Christian movement. Other denominations include a broad range of Christian groups, including five Orthodox denominations. In addition, there are seven Buddhist groups and three Islamic communities.

Hungarian citizens are able to donate 1.0 percent of their income taxes to the religion of their choice and an additional 1.0 percent to the nonprofit agency of their choice. The Government nearly doubles the taxpayers’ donation, adding 0.9 percent of the sum given to each group. Statistics from the collection of tax revenue voluntarily directed for use by religious groups confirm the ranking of traditional estimates of religious affiliation. In 2004, 15.6 percent of the taxpayers contributed \$17.5 million to 119 religious groups.

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.

Easter Monday, Whit Monday, All Saints’ Day, and Christmas are celebrated as national holidays. These holidays do not negatively affect any religious groups.

The 1990 Law on the Freedom of Conscience regulates the activities and benefits enjoyed by religious communities and establishes the criteria for legal designation. To register as a religion, religious groups must submit a statement to a county court declaring that they have at least 100 followers. The court questions only whether the registration of the new group is constitutional. While any group is free to practice its faith, formal registration makes available certain protections and privileges and grants access to several forms of state funding. The courts have registered a total of 144 religious groups since 1990.

Religious instruction is not part of the education curricula in public schools; however, the Government permits primary and secondary school students to enroll in extracurricular religious education classes. Optional religious instruction is usually held after the normal school day and is taught by representatives of religious groups in school facilities. While the Government makes provisions for minority religions to engage in religious education in public schools, the four historical religions provide the majority of after-hours religious instruction. During the 2004–05 school year, 45 registered religious groups provided religious instruction to 515,223 out of a total of 1.4 million students in public schools.

The military chaplain's service has permanent pastoral representation by the four historic religions in the defense forces. The Government also requires the military to respect the rights of other religions by providing pastoral care for their members. The Ministry of Defense funds and maintains the chaplains' service. There is no evidence that soldiers receive preferential treatment for either foregoing or using the chaplain's service. The Ministry of Justice regulates a similar system for the provision of religious services to prisoners.

The Government allocates public funds to registered religions. In 2004, the Government allocated approximately \$130.3 million in public funds for various religious activities and related programs. Government expenditures supported religious practice, educational work, and the maintenance of public art collections of cultural value. Compensation for non-restituted religious property, the reconstruction of religious institutions, and the general subsidy for religious activities comprised the largest components of state financial support. The Government provides the same level of financial support for private religious education as for state institutions on a per child basis. Government support decreased in 2005 because of budgetary constraints.

In 2003, the Government allocated \$7.5 million to clergy working in settlements with populations of less than 5,000.

To promote the revitalization of religious institutions and settle property issues, the Government signed separate agreements with the four historic religions and with two smaller churches (Hungarian Baptist and Budai Serb Orthodox) between 1997 and 1999. The religious groups and the Government agreed on a number of properties to be returned and an amount of monetary compensation to be paid for properties that could not be returned. These agreements are subsumed under the 1991 Compensation Law, which requires the Government to compensate religious groups for properties confiscated by the Government after January 1, 1946. In 2004, the Government paid religious groups \$11 million, and was expected to give \$15 million to religious groups in 2005, as compensation for the assets confiscated during the Communist regime. While these agreements primarily address property issues and restitution, they also have provisions requiring the Government to support religious organizations that provide social services as well as support for the preservation of religious monuments.

At the end of 2004, there were 837 pending cases of real property that once belonged to religious groups, which the Government must decide whether or not to return before 2011. At the end of the first quarter of 2005, there remained 801 pending cases. Real estate cases have involved 12 religious groups: Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian, Baptist, Hungarian Romanian Orthodox, Hungarian Orthodox, Budai Serb Orthodox, Hungarian Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, the Salvation Army, and the Confederation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz). In 2004, the Government resolved 131 cases involving 160 properties primarily belonging to the Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran churches. There were 56 properties returned to churches, and churches received monetary compensation for 104 properties. Overall 7,572 claims were made by religious groups for property restitution under the 1991 Compensation Law: 2,695 cases were rejected as inapplicable under the law; the Government decided to return property in 1,897 cases and gave cash payments in another 1,953 cases; 1,027 cases were resolved directly between former and present owners without government intervention; and the remainder (801 cases) must be decided by 2011. The properties include general-use property in addition to buildings that had been used for religious services. Members of the Jewish community view the restitution process as generally fair but would like

to see compensation paid for the estimated \$2 to \$16 billion worth of heirless Jewish properties specifically excluded from the restitution process.

During the period covered by this report, the Government Office of Historical Archives of the State Security Services signed an agency-to-agency agreement with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum granting access to 365 Holocaust era files.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, several minority religious groups have claimed that the Government provides preferential treatment for the four largest denominations. While there are several laws that grant rights and privileges to the historic religions, such as per capita funding for church-run universities, the Government has shown steady improvement over the last several years in extending all rights and privileges to every religion.

In June 2004, the Constitutional Court reviewed and abolished a 2003 amendment to a law on social care that required religious organizations to prove the necessity of any social institution they wished to set up before they could receive government subsidies. The amendment appears to have been aimed at limiting the Government's financial exposure under the 1997 agreements that compel it to fund churches' social institutions. The court reviewed the amendment at the request of the Catholic Church and ruled that it infringed upon the rights of all religious organizations and conflicts with the relevant 1997 agreements.

In June 2004, the Constitutional Court upheld a 2003 law on equal treatment that prohibits, inter alia, religious organizations from discriminating against non-parishioners in the hiring of non-clergy and in school admissions. The challenge was brought by the Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran Churches, as well as the Alliance of Jewish Communities, after the first instance court ordered the reinstatement of a homosexual student expelled from a Calvinist university.

In November 2004, the Christian churches called on their followers to vote "yes" for the December 5 referendum on dual citizenship for ethnic Hungarians living abroad. This prompted government criticism from the highest levels of the churches for "undue involvement in politics." This criticism was repeated by the Prime Minister at a press conference subsequent to his audience with Pope John Paul II in December 2004.

In December 2004, several thousand teachers, parents, and students of church schools peacefully protested the proposed cuts in government funding for parochial schools. Representatives from the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the three other historic churches also attended the protest. The ensuing debate centered around a difference of opinion on how to calculate the per child support provided to state schools. (The Vatican Treaty and several other 1997 agreements obligate the Government to provide the same amount of per child funding to parochial schools as it provides to public schools.) The Government argued that the local governments, through which state support is channeled, often chose not to fund their public schools with the full amount allocated by the national government and therefore claimed that it could commensurately reduce the funding provided to parochial schools and still keep to the 1997 agreements.

Subsequent to the protest and the Prime Minister's audience with the Pope, the Holy See issued public statements in both Vatican City and Budapest defending the country's churches' right to participate in public life and called on the Government to fulfill its commitments under the Vatican Treaty. In January 2005, the Government restored almost all the proposed cuts to parochial school funding.

There were credible reports that the Government delayed subsidy payments to churches for their parochial schools and other social institutions in an effort to control spending. Church officials reported that as of May 2005, no subsidy payments for their social institutions had been received. In May 2005, the Calvinist Church won a court case against the Ministry of Education for non-payment of government subsidies for its educational institutions for the handicapped. The court has ordered the Ministry of Education to pay more than \$250,000 for 2 years' back subsidy.

Several smaller churches requested that the Government provide per student support for their universities, as it does with the four historic churches. The Government recently informed these churches that it does not expect any changes to this policy in the near future. The smaller churches pressed for equal media programming time given to the smaller denominations. There are 11 churches with regular programs on public radio or television.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government has continued its strong efforts to combat anti-Semitism by clearly speaking out against the use of coded speech by right-wing extremists, and the Prime Minister publicly stated that Hungarians were also responsible for the Holocaust. In February 2005, the previous and current Prime Ministers attended the 60th anniversary commemoration of the liberation of the Budapest ghettos. All four parliamentary parties were in attendance at this ceremony and at the March of the Living event in Auschwitz.

The Government donated a building to the Krishna Believer's Church for use in its newly instituted university.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between religious groups are amicable, and there is little friction between religions. Several Christian churches and the Jewish community have institutionalized a Christian-Jewish dialogue, bringing together religious academics for regular discussions. Across a wide range of other areas, religions also have shown a great willingness to work together to achieve common social or political goals. During the period covered by this report, the four largest Christian churches agreed to investigate and speak out against anti-Semitic incidents in the country.

The Jewish community stated that there were fewer acts of vandalism in Jewish cemeteries than in previous years. It attributed most of the incidents to youths, and did not consider the incidents anti-Semitic.

In July 2004, a Jewish cemetery in the north was vandalized. More than 90 gravestones were smashed just weeks after the local town council had renovated the cemetery to mark the 60th anniversary of the Holocaust.

In June 2005, during the Shavuot holiday, more than 130 grave sites were vandalized in the largest Jewish cemetery in Budapest. No overtly anti-Semitic manifestations were discovered, such as graffiti or swastikas, but this was the largest desecration of any cemetery since the regime change of 1989. The leaders of all four parliamentary parties strongly condemned the act, and the police began an investigation. No suspects had been identified at the end of the period covered by this report.

Representatives of the Jewish community expressed concern over anti-Semitism in some media outlets, in society, and in coded political speech. For example, certain segments of an ongoing Sunday news magazine, *Vasarnapi Ujsag*, on Hungarian Public Radio were criticized for presenting guests who held anti-Semitic viewpoints. The weekly newspaper *Magyar Demokrata* published anti-Semitic articles and featured articles by authors who have denied the Holocaust.

Jewish Community representatives requested the Ministry of Cultural Heritage to close a county museum exhibition highlighting the pro-fascist Arrow Cross and Hungarian nationalism during World War II. The exhibition was closed, and the materials were returned to their owners. During their visit to the country in April 2005, the Chief Rabbi and the President of Israel spoke positively of the situation of the Jewish community in the country.

Local non-governmental organizations succeeded in getting a court order stripping the neo-Nazi group Blood and Honor of its official registration. A new unregistered neo-Nazi group, Hungarian Future, planned a public demonstration to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the fascist takeover of the country. Several groups have planned anti-fascist counter demonstrations for the same day and locale. The police have found no legal grounds on which to ban the demonstration.

On April 5, 2005, hundreds of persons participated in the unveiling ceremony of a statue of Pal Teleki, the Prime Minister of the country in the 1920s, who was the first in Europe to enact anti-Semitic legislation. The Minister of Culture, Istvan Hiller, cancelled plans for setting up the statue in Budapest after pressure from the Wiesenthal Center. The statue, which was to have been set up opposite the President's official residence in Budapest, was eventually erected in the courtyard opposite the Catholic Church in the town of Balatonbolgar on the shore of Lake Balaton.

Overall, society welcomed the increasing religious activity that followed the transition from communism. However, lingering effects of the Communist Party's suppression of religion remain. Officials from Christian churches believe that it will be another generation at least before the majority of citizens realize that religion has a vital role to play in the nation's public life. Church leaders believe that the divisive political climate in the country affects societal attitudes toward religion, as church statements on important public issues tend to be seen as politically motivated. Politicians on the left have routinely criticized the churches for their perceived political support for the right ever since the regime change of 1989, and an increase in the left's mistrust of church motives during the period covered by this report.

Parliament again during the period covered by this report failed to correct constitutional deficiencies in the 1997 amendment to the hate speech law, which itself was intended to resolve conflicting court decisions and make it easier to enforce and stiffen penalties for crimes related to the victim's ethnicity, race, or nationality. (In May 2004, The Constitutional Court ruled that the law was too vague and returned it to Parliament for refinement.)

Reports of vandalism or destruction of Christian and Jewish property exhibited a downward trend, while burglaries involving places of worship rose. During 2004, the National Police reported 339 cases of vandalism to cemeteries and 1431 burglary cases involving places of worship, compared with 459 cemetery vandalism cases and 108 burglaries at places of worship in 2003. During the first quarter of 2005, the National Police reported 39 cases of vandalism to cemeteries, and 468 cases of burglary involving places of worship. There were no data on which churches owned the cemeteries. Most police and religious authorities considered these incidents as acts of youth vandalism and not indications of religious intolerance.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom activities, maintaining regular contact with government officials, Members of Parliament, leaders of large and small religions, and representatives of local and international NGOs that address issues of religious freedom. Through these contacts, embassy officers have tracked closely the dispute over parochial school funding and the possible effect on clergy that the country's proposed lustration legislation may have. Embassy officers have also worked with Mazsihisz to identify Jewish cemeteries for possible restoration by the U.S. Commission to Preserve America's Cultural Heritage Abroad.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy has facilitated the transfer of Holocaust-era records to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and has lobbied the Government at the highest levels for greater archival access for the Museum.

The Embassy also has remained active on issues of compensation and property restitution for Holocaust victims, as well as on the recent United States Government settlement in the so-called Gold Train case. Embassy officers had worked with Mazsihisz, the Hungarian Jewish Public Foundation, other local and international Jewish organizations, Members of Parliament, and the Prime Minister's Office to maintain dialogue on restitution issues, and to promote fair compensation. The Embassy released a statement condemning the June 2005 Kozma Street (Budapest) cemetery desecrations, and calling for respect and tolerance of all religions. Embassy officers had inspected the damages at the cemetery and provided estimates and photos to the U.S. Commission for a possible restoration project.

The Embassy continued to urge the Government to speak out against anti-Semitism and hate speech.

ICELAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the State financially supports and promotes Lutheranism as the country's official religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is the state church, enjoys some advantages not available to other faiths in the country and provides social services regardless of creed.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, and there have been no reports of religious persecution.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 39,600 square miles, and its population is approximately 293,577. Most residents live on or near the coasts. The area surrounding the capital, Reykjavik, is home to approximately 60 percent of the country's total population.

According to the National Statistical Bureau, 250,661 persons (85.5 percent of the total population) are members of the state Lutheran Church. During the period covered by this report, a total of 1,123 individuals resigned from the Church, as against 170 new registrants. Many of those who resigned from the state Church joined one of the Lutheran Free Churches, which have a total membership of 13,155 persons (4.5 percent of the population). The breakdown in membership is as follows: Reykjavik Free Church—6,202; Hafnarfjordur Free Church—4,365; and Reykjavik Independent Church—2,588. A total of 13,598 individuals (4.6 percent) are members of 22 other small recognized and registered religious organizations ranging from the Roman Catholic Church (5,775 members) to the First Baptist Church (10 members). There were 8,733 individuals (3 percent) who belonged to other or nonspecified religious organizations and 7,144 (2.4 percent) who were not part of any religious organization. There also are religions, such as Judaism, that have been practiced in the country for years but have never requested official recognition. In official statistics, these religions are listed as "other and unspecified." The National Statistical Bureau does not keep track of Jewish community numbers, and there is no synagogue or Jewish cultural center; however, up to 60 people attend occasional Jewish holiday parties and themed lectures and discussions organized by a few Jewish immigrants.

Although the majority of citizens use traditional Lutheran rituals to mark events such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals, most Lutherans do not regularly attend Sunday services. In a March 2004 Gallup poll, only 10 percent of respondents stated that they attend ordinary church services one or more times a month, while 43 percent stated they never attend church.

According to statistics provided by the immigration authorities, the number of foreigners receiving a residence permit has increased significantly during the past several years. In direct relation to the increase in foreigners (itinerant workers, immigrants, and refugees), the number of religious organizations has significantly increased. Foreigners make up more than half of the Roman Catholic population. The Reykjavik Catholic Church holds one service each week in English, and many Filipinos attend. A growing number of Catholic Poles live in the country, where they work in the fishing and shipbuilding industries. Two Polish priests serve the Polish Catholic community. Since there are few Catholic churches outside of Reykjavik, Lutheran ministers regularly lend their churches to Catholic priests so that they may conduct Masses for members in rural areas.

The Association of Muslims in Iceland (Félag Múslima á Íslandi), founded in 1997, has 329 members (out of approximately 800 Muslims living in the country according to the Association). Muslims are mostly concentrated in the capital area, although there are a number of Kosovar Muslim refugees in the small northern town of Dalvik. Since 2002 the community has had its own house of worship, with daily prayer nights and weekly Friday prayers that attract a core group of approximately 30 individuals. A 2000 application for land to build a mosque has languished in Reykjavik's planning commission, apparently because of a dispute between Association members and city planners about the project's size.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) accounts for the only significant foreign missionary activity 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 official state religion is Lutheranism.

The Constitution provides all persons the right to form religious associations and to practice religion in accordance with their personal beliefs. It also bans teaching or practices harmful to good morals or public order. In addition, the General Penal Code protects religious practice by establishing fines and imprisonment for up to three months for those who publicly deride or belittle the religious doctrines or worship of a lawful religious association active in the country.

Article 62 of the Constitution establishes the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the state church and pledges the State's support and protection. Parliament has the power to pass a law to change this article. Although surveys show that the majority of citizens favor the concept of separation of church and state, most probably would not support the change if it meant closing Lutheran churches because of lack of funding. Although few citizens regularly attend services, they see the Lutheran religion as part of their culture and view the closing of a church as losing a part of their heritage. In October 2004, the Alliance Party presented a parliamentary motion on constitutional amendments that included a clause calling for consideration of the separation of church and state. The Liberal Party had presented a similar bill in 2003. Neither initiative has yet made it out of committee. Sidmennt, the 160-member Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, strongly supports legislation to separate church and state. A 2004 Gallup poll found the general population evenly split on the issue.

The State directly pays the salaries of the 147 ministers in the state church, and these ministers are considered public servants under the Ministry of Judicial and Ecclesiastical Affairs. These ministers counsel persons of all faiths and offer ecumenical services for marriages and funerals. The State operates a network of Lutheran parish churches throughout the country. In new housing areas, land automatically is set aside for the construction of a parish church to serve the neighborhood.

A 1999 law sets specific conditions and procedures that religious organizations must follow to gain state subsidies. All taxpayers 16 years of age and older must pay a church tax amounting to approximately \$125 (ISK 7,800) a year and a cemetery tax of approximately \$48 (ISK 2,952) a year. Individuals are free to direct their church tax payments to any of the religious groups officially registered and recognized by the State. For persons who are not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belong to one that is not registered, the tax payment goes to the University of Iceland, a secular institution. Atheists have objected to having their fee go to the University, asserting that this is inconsistent with the constitutional right of freedom of association.

During the period covered by this report, the Government gave the state church approximately \$62 million (ISK 3.9 billion). Of that amount, the church tax funded \$22 million (ISK 1.4 billion), the cemetery tax \$11.5 million (ISK 714 million), and general revenues \$29 million (ISK 1.8 billion). The state church operates all cemeteries in the country, and the \$11.5 million from the cemetery tax must be used solely for this purpose. All recognized religious denominations have equal access to the country's cemeteries. The church tax also provided a total of \$2.4 million (ISK 151 million) to the other recognized religions and a total of \$1.5 million (ISK 93 million) to the University of Iceland.

The Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs handles applications for recognition and registration of religious organizations. The law provides for a three-member panel consisting of a theologian, a lawyer, and a social scientist to review the applications. To become registered, a religious organization must, among other things, be well established within the country and have a core group of members who regularly practice the religion in compliance with its teachings. All registered religious organizations are required to submit an annual report to the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs describing the organization's operations over the past year. The law also specifies that the leader of a religious organization must be at least 25 years old and pay taxes in the country. No restrictions or requirements are placed on unregistered religious organizations, which have the same rights as other groups in society.

Law Number 108/1999 confirms that parents control the religious affiliation of their children until the children reach the age of 16. However, the Children's Act requires that parents consult their children about any changes in the children's affiliation after the age of 12. In the absence of specific instructions to the contrary, children at birth are assumed to have the same religious affiliation as their mother and are registered as such.

Under Law Number 66/1995, which regulates public elementary schools, the Government requires instruction in Christianity, ethics, and theology during the period of compulsory education; that is, ages 6 through 16. Virtually all schools are public schools, with a few exceptions such as a Roman Catholic parochial school located in Reykjavik. All schools are subject to Law Number 66 with respect to the compulsory curriculum. However, the precise content of this instruction can vary, and some observers have claimed that indoctrination can take place, as the curriculum is not rigid and as teachers often are given wide latitude in the classroom. Some teachers place greater emphasis on ethical and philosophical issues rather than on specifically religious instruction. Lessons on non-Christian religions are part of the cur-

riculum, but teachers ultimately teach mostly about Christianity. The rationale behind the focus on Christianity in religious instruction is based on the creed's historically strong influence on the country's society and culture.

Students may be exempted from Christianity classes. The law provides the Minister of Education with the formal authority to exempt pupils from instruction in compulsory subjects such as Christianity. In practice, individual school authorities issue exemptions informally. There is no obligation for school authorities to offer other religious or secular instruction in place of Christianity classes.

According to a report published in 2003 by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), in some cases children find it difficult to obtain exemption from religious instruction, particularly at the primary level. In addition, members of several non-Christian organizations expressed their concern to ECRI that students ridicule classmates who opt out of religious education. The ECRI report urged school officials to provide children who do not wish to attend religious instruction in Christianity with alternative classes. The report also asked officials to give all children the opportunity to learn about different religions and faiths.

The Government does not actively promote interfaith understanding. The Government does not sponsor programs or official church-government councils to coordinate interfaith dialogue, but many church groups sponsor meetings between the leaders of the various religious organizations. A Japanese-born minister of the state church has been designated to serve the immigrant community and help recent arrivals of all faiths integrate into society. Holocaust education is not a required element of the national school program, but the subject is taught in most schools as part of a mandatory history curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of physical violence against Jews or acts of violence against, or vandalism of, Jewish community institutions. Incidents of harassment were rare.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. If members of religious minorities face discrimination, it is more indirect in nature, taking the form of prejudice and lack of interfaith or intercultural understanding. The country has a small, close-knit, homogenous society that closely guards its culture and is not accustomed to accommodating outsiders. Although most citizens are not active members of the state church, Lutheranism is still an important part of the country's cultural identity. Harassment of the country's tiny, inconspicuous Jewish community is infrequent and not organized.

During the last decade, there has been increased awareness of other religious groups, and informal interfaith meetings, seminars, and courses have been held. In May 2005, the National Church for the first time organized an interfaith meeting of the leaders of major registered religious groups (defined as those with 150 or more members). Attendees decided to establish a permanent Interfaith Forum that will foster dialogue and strengthen links between religious groups. A second meeting was planned for August 2005.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy also maintains a regular dialogue on religious freedom issues with the leaders of various religious groups and nongovernmental organizations. For example, in May 2005, the Ambassador invited members of the Muslim community, as well as aid workers, parlia-

mentarians, and journalists returned from Muslim-majority countries, to his residence for a discussion on how to break down barriers between Islam and the West.

IRELAND

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 27,136 square miles, and its population is approximately four million. The country is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. According to official government statistics from the 2002 census, the religious affiliation of the population was 88.4 percent Roman Catholic (3,462,606), 2.9 percent Church of Ireland (115,611), 0.55 percent Christian (unspecified), 0.52 percent Presbyterian (20,582), 0.25 percent Methodist (10,033), 0.49 percent Muslim (19,147), and less than 0.1 percent Jewish (1,790). Approximately 5.5 percent (217,358) of the population stated no preference or adherence to a particular religion.

The number of immigrants increased, and they tended to be non-Catholic. Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continued to grow, especially in Dublin. Immigrants and noncitizens encountered few difficulties in practicing their faiths.

According to a survey, which included Northern Ireland, conducted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference, approximately 60 percent of the 4, 171,000 Irish and Northern Irish Roman Catholics attended Mass once a week and 220,000 attended Mass once a day. The Conference reported that there was a noticeable increase in attendance during Christmas and Easter holidays and around the time of the death of Pope John Paul II.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

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 prohibits promotion of one religion over another and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and the Government does not restrict the teaching or practice of any faith. There is no state religion, and there was no discrimination against nontraditional religious groups. There is no legal requirement that religious groups or organizations register with the Government, nor is there any formal mechanism for government recognition of a religion or religious group.

The Employment Equality Act prohibits discrimination in employment on nine grounds, including religion. The Equality Authority works toward continued progress in the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality in employment. The Equal Status 2000 Act prohibits discrimination outside of employment (such as in education or provision of goods) on the same grounds cited in the Employment Equality Act.

While Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion, it was not favored officially or in practice. Because of the country's history and tradition as a predominantly Catholic country and society, the majority of those in political office are Catholic, and some Catholic holy days are also national holidays.

The following religious holy days are considered national holidays: St. Patrick's Day (the country's national day), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day. These holidays did not negatively affect any religious group. The Government does not require but does permit religious instruction in public schools. Most primary and secondary schools are denominational, and their boards of management were governed partially by trustees within the Catholic Church or in some cases, the Church of Ireland. Under the terms of the Constitution, the Department

of Education must and does provide equal funding to schools of different religious denominations, including Islamic and Jewish schools. Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

In 2003, the Equality Authority published a booklet that states that church-linked schools are permitted legally to refuse to admit a student who is not of that religion, providing the school can prove that the refusal is essential to maintain the “ethos” of the school (i.e., too many Catholics in a Muslim school could prevent the school from having a Muslim “ethos”). However, there were no reports of any children being refused admission to any school for this reason. The Government permitted homeschooling, but few parents chose this educational option.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion. There were no incidents of forced conversion of minor U.S. citizens or of their abduction or illegal removal from the United States or of refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In November 2004, in an effort to reach out across community and faith lines, the government invited key religious leaders, including the imam from a prominent mosque, to take part in the country’s presidential inauguration. In December 2004, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, in line with a proposed EU Constitution Interfaith initiative, announced the development of a new interfaith dialogue (yet to begin). In March 2005, government officials attended and took part in a “Muslims in Ireland Today” conference held at a prominent mosque in the country. In addition, the Garda (the police) Racial and Intercultural Office placed 145 Ethnic Liaison Officers around the country to advise police and monitor policing activity in light of the increasing number of ethnic and religious groups that are immigrating to the country.

The U.S. Embassy’s initiative promoting Thanksgiving as a day of celebration among communities of faith encouraged the Government and media to develop an outreach to minority religious groups.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Society largely was homogenous; as a result, religious differences were not tied to ethnic or political differences. Various religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academic institutions had activities or projects designed to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions.

There were reports of four acts of vandalism on the Irish Jewish Museum and Jewish markers in a cemetery. Culprits have yet to be identified.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In September 2004, the U.S. Embassy began its Muslim Outreach program aimed at fostering greater understanding of political, social, cultural, and religious views prevalent among Muslims in the country, and Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met regularly with Muslims. Embassy officials also met with the Chief Rabbi of Ireland, the head of the Egyptian Coptic church, and prominent leaders from both Catholic and Protestant faiths. The Embassy’s interfaith Thanksgiving reception facilitated dialogue among governmental, NGO, religious, and community leaders.

ITALY

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. There is no state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church enjoys some privileges, stemming from its sovereign status and its historical political authority, not available to other faiths.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic Church's influential role in society has led to controversy when church teachings have appeared to influence Catholic legislators on matters of public policy. Increasing immigration has led to some anti-immigrant sentiment; for the country's many Muslim immigrants, religion has served as an additional factor differentiating them from native-born citizens.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 116,347 square miles, and its population is approximately 57.8 million. An estimated 87 percent of native-born citizens are nominally Roman Catholic, but only 20 percent regularly participate in worship services. According to numbers reported by the communities, members of Jehovah's Witnesses form the second largest Christian denomination among native-born citizens, numbering approximately 231,000 adherents, followed by members of the Assembly of God (78,000), Methodists and Waldesians (27,000), and Mormons (22,000).

However, immigration—both legal and illegal—continues to add large groups of non-Christian residents, mainly Muslims, from North Africa, South Asia, Albania, and the Middle East. Of 2.9 million legal immigrants, an estimated 1 million are Muslim, primarily Sunnis. There are approximately 75,000 Hindus. Buddhists include approximately 40,000 adherents of European origin and 20,000 of Asian origin. A Jewish community of approximately 30,000 maintains synagogues in 21 cities. Other significant religious communities include Orthodox churches, small Protestant groups, the Baha'i Faith, and South Asian Hindus. Polls conducted in 2003 showed that approximately 14 percent of the population consider themselves to be either atheists or agnostics.

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.

Prior to the Constitution's adoption in 1947, the country's relations with the Catholic Church were governed by a 1929 Concordat, which resolved longstanding disputes stemming from the dissolution of the Papal States and established Catholicism as the country's state religion. A 1984 revision of the Concordat formalized the principle of a secular state but maintained the practice of state support for religion—support that also could be extended, if requested, to non-Catholic confessions. In such cases, state support is to be governed by legislation implementing the provisions of an accord ("intesa") between the Government and the religious confession. An intesa grants ministers of religion automatic access to state hospitals, prisons, and military barracks, allows for civil registry of religious marriages, facilitates special religious practices regarding funerals, and exempts students from school attendance on religious holidays. If a religious community so requests, an intesa may provide for state routing of funds, through a voluntary check-off on taxpayer returns, to that community, a privilege that some communities initially declined but later requested. The absence of an intesa does not affect a religious group's ability to worship freely; however, the privileges granted by an intesa are not always granted automatically, and a religious community without an intesa does not benefit financially from the voluntary check-off on taxpayer returns.

In 1984, the first such accord granted specific benefits to the Waldesian Church. Similar accords, which are negotiated by the Prime Minister's Office and require parliamentary approval, extended similar benefits to the Adventists and Assembly of God (1988), Jews (1989), and Baptists and Lutherans (1995). In 2000, the Government signed accords with the Buddhist Union and Jehovah's Witnesses; however,

these intese did not receive parliamentary ratification before that Government left office in 2001. The Government initiated negotiations with the Mormons (2000), the Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate (2000), the Apostolic Church (2001), Hindus (2001), and Soka Gakkai (Japanese Buddhists—2001). The Government chose to complete work on pending requests and submit all such accords—including those previously signed with the Buddhist Union and Jehovah's Witnesses—to Parliament as a single package. Before seeking approval of the accords, the Government wants to complete pending omnibus religious freedom legislation, which incorporates provisions contained in other laws. It plans to complete this legislation before its term expires. Consequently, the accords awaited parliamentary approval at the end of the period covered by this report. Divisions among the country's Muslim organizations, as well as its multiple Muslim immigrant groups, have hindered that community's efforts to seek an intesa.

The revised Concordat of 1984 accorded the Catholic Church certain privileges. For example, the Church is allowed to select Catholic teachers, paid by the State, to provide instruction in "hour of religion" courses taught in the public schools. This class is optional, and students who do not wish to attend are free to study other subjects or, in certain cases, to leave school early. While in the past this instruction involved Catholic priests teaching catechism, church-selected instructors now may be either lay or religious, and their instruction is intended to include material relevant to non-Catholic faiths. Problems may arise in small communities where information about other faiths and numbers of non-Catholic communicants is limited. The Constitution prohibits state support for private schools; however, declining enrollment in Catholic schools has led Catholic Church officials, as operators of the country's most extensive network of private schools, to seek government aid.

While Roman Catholicism is no longer the state religion, its role as the dominant religion occasionally gives rise to problems. In 2004, Parliament passed legislation favored by the Vatican that equates an embryo with a human life, prohibits the use of donated sperm for artificial insemination, restricts the production of embryos, and limits scientific research on embryos. The legislation drew support from Catholic legislators across the political spectrum, while secular conservatives and Communists joined to oppose it. In January 2005, Camillo Ruini, President of the Italian Bishops' Council, urged Catholics to abstain from voting for four referenda to abolish parts of the new fertility law; this sparked strong reactions from some leftist leaders who accused the Catholic Church of inappropriate interference in the political process. The June 2005 referenda failed when only 26 of the required 50-plus percent of the population voted. The low turnout reflected a variety of factors, including Church opposition, the ambivalence of most secular politicians, and voter apathy on a summer weekend. During the period covered by this report, prominent Catholic politicians joined Pope John Paul II and other church officials (including Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who has now been elected Pope Benedict XVI) in asserting that the draft European Constitution should include language recognizing Europe's Christian heritage.

The continuing presence of Catholic symbols, such as crucifixes, in courtrooms, schools, and other public buildings has drawn criticism and has led to a number of lawsuits. In April 2005, a court ruled that crucifixes do not have to be removed from polling stations, as requested by the president of a small Islamic association. In December 2004, the Constitutional Court ruled that, based on a technicality, a 1928 regulation that provides for the display of crucifixes in public classrooms is constitutional. A mother in Venice, who asked that the crucifixes be removed, brought the case. In March, Interior Minister Pisanu argued publicly that the crucifix was a symbol of great value that represented 2,000 years of civilization and culture. In 2003, President Ciampi argued that the crucifix was a symbol of national identity and not only a religious emblem and was praised by several politicians and intellectuals for his position.

Muslim women are free to wear the veil in public offices and schools; however, there were occasional reports of objections to women wearing a burqah (a garment that completely covers the face and body). In August 2004, a woman in Drezzo was fined for wearing a burqah under a seldom-used 1931 law that forbids persons from hiding their identity.

In view of the negative aspects of the country's fascist past, government leaders routinely acknowledge and pay tribute to Jews victimized by the country's 1938 racial laws.

In January 2004, PM Berlusconi created a new "Inter-Ministerial Commission to Combat Anti-Semitism" to ensure strong, uniform responses to any anti-Semitic acts by the police and local/federal government officials. In December 2004, the Government hosted, with the Anti-Defamation League, an international conference on anti-Semitism.

National, regional, and local authorities organize annual educational initiatives and other events to support National Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27. In 2004, the country acted as Chair of the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, the Ministry of Education organized an international conference to train teachers on the Shoah, and PM Berlusconi attended ceremonies to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In 2004, the mayor of Rome announced the establishment of a museum dedicated to the Shoah, while in 2003, the Parliament approved the creation of a National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Ferrara; planning was in process, but construction had not begun at the end of the period covered by this report.

Missionaries or religious workers do not encounter problems but must apply for appropriate visas prior to arriving in the country.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious and government officials continued to encourage mutual respect for religious differences.

Increasing immigration, from Eastern Europe, Africa, China, and the Middle East, is altering demographic and cultural patterns in communities across the country and has led to some anti-immigrant sentiment. For the country's Muslim immigrants, religion serves as an additional factor differentiating them from native-born citizens. Some Catholic politicians and community leaders have contributed to popular reaction by emphasizing the perceived threat posed by immigrants to the country's "national identity," whereas others, including Interior Minister Pisanu and Chamber of Deputies President Casini, underlined the need in speeches and statements during the period covered by this report to integrate different ethnic groups present in the country. Interior Minister Pisanu ordered his Prefects to reach out to moderate Muslim communities to enhance their integration into society. In December 2004, the Minister of Equal Opportunity created a new national Office to Combat Racial and Ethnic Discrimination to monitor and prevent discrimination and assist victims with legal assistance. The office established a hot line to receive complaints and began a public relations effort to discourage ethnic, racial and religious discrimination.

The arrest and prosecution of Islamic extremists in 2002 for using prayer centers to plan, coordinate, and support terrorism and the replacement of the imam of Rome's Grand Mosque for preaching violence against "infidels" prompted some commentators and politicians to generalize about Islam's incompatibility with societies organized around Judeo-Christian values and beliefs. Other prominent politicians, including Interior Minister Pisanu and Senate President Marcello Pera, rejected such generalizations and urged increased interfaith dialogue. Pisanu proposed a European Charter of Interfaith Dialogue to the European Council of Ministers in 2003 during the country's tenure in the rotating European Union (EU) Presidency (June–December 2003); the EU Council of Ministers of Interior approved the Charter in November. Pera advocated rapid conclusion of an intesa with leaders of the Islamic faith as an additional means to isolate extremists.

Some members of the Northern League political party, a minority member of the governing coalition, asserted that practices present in many Islamic societies, notably polygamy, Islamic family law, the role of women, and the lack of separation between religion and state, rendered many Muslim immigrants incompatible for integration into society.

There were no violent anti-Semitic attacks, but recent public opinion surveys indicated that anti-Semitism is growing in the country, as it is across Europe. According to pollsters, this trend was tied to, and in some cases fed by, widespread opposition to the Sharon government and popular support for the Palestinian cause. Small

scale graffiti (swastikas) were found in major cities. There have been some incidents of Israeli diplomats being heckled at public events.

Government units provide funds for the construction of places of worship as well as public land for their construction, and they help preserve and maintain historic places of worship that shelter much of the country's artistic and cultural heritage. In 2001, the Campania regional administration approved the request for approximately \$3.1 million (2.6 million euros) to build a mosque in Naples despite the absence of a formal intesa between the State and the Muslim confession. Construction had not yet begun at the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

KAZAKHSTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the various religious communities worship largely without government interference. Although local officials attempt on occasion to limit the practice of religion by some nontraditional groups, higher-level officials or courts usually intervene to correct such attempts.

The overall status of religious freedom deteriorated somewhat during the period covered by this report. Several pieces of recent legislation limit constitutional protections of religious freedom. The Extremism Law enacted in February 2005 allows the Government to criminalize membership in designated political or religious organizations. The Religion Law and related codes were amended through a set of National Security Amendments that were signed into law in July 2005. The amendments impose mandatory registration on missionaries and religious organizations. Several provisions in the new legislation appear to violate the constitutional guarantee of separation of church and state; however, the amendments were not referred to the Constitutional Council for review prior to their passage.

During the period covered by this report, instances of harassment of religious organizations by local officials remained consistent with the previous reporting period. Reports of local law enforcement officials visiting religious organizations for inspections continued to decrease during the reporting period and most religious organizations reported generally good cooperation with the Government.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other U.S. officials have supported the country's efforts to increase links and mutual understanding among religious groups. U.S. officials engaged in private and public dialogue at all levels to encourage that any new legislation remain consistent with the country's constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and with the country's tradition of religious tolerance. Embassy and Department of State officials visited religious facilities and met with religious leaders. During the reporting period, the Embassy sponsored a number of exchange programs for Muslim and other religious leaders to meet with a broad and diverse range of their counterparts in the United States. Embassy officials maintained an ongoing dialogue with a broad range of groups within the religious community.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,052,540 square miles, and according to January 2005 data from the Government's Agency for Statistics, its population is 15,074,200.

The society is ethnically diverse, and many religions are represented. Due in part to the country's nomadic and Soviet past, many residents describe themselves as nonbelievers. Several researchers have reported and surveys have suggested low levels of religious conviction and worship attendance. The Government maintains statistics on the number of registered congregations and organizations but does not keep statistics on the size of each group. The most recent reliable statistics on percent of population subscribing to a particular faith come from the 1999 census. Although there has been a large increase in the number of minority religious congregations registered since 1999, the Government believes that percentages of the population adhering to particular faiths has remained consistent.

Ethnic Kazakhs, who constitute approximately one half of the national population, along with ethnic Uzbeks, Uighurs, and Tatars, who collectively comprise less than 10 percent of the population, are historically Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School. Other Islamic groups, which account for less than 1 percent of the population, include Shafit Sunni (traditionally practiced by Chechens), Shi'a, Sufi, and Ahmadi. The country's highest concentration of citizens who identify themselves as practicing Muslims is located in the southern regions bordering Uzbekistan. A sizeable population of ethnic Russians, and smaller populations of ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Belarusians, are by tradition Russian Orthodox; together they constitute approximately one-third of the country's population. An estimated 1.5 percent of the population is ethnic German, many of whom are Roman Catholic or Lutheran.

According to government statistics, evangelical Christian and Baptist congregations outnumber Russian Orthodox congregations, although it is unlikely that the number of adherents is also higher. Other Christian associations with a sizable number of congregations include Presbyterians, Lutherans, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Pentecostals.

There is a Roman Catholic archdiocese, adherents of which account for 2 percent of the population, including many ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Germans. The Government reported 86 registered Roman Catholic dioceses and organizations throughout the country.

A small Jewish community, estimated at well below 1 percent of the population, has synagogues in several larger cities, including Almaty, Astana, and Pavlodar. Rabbis in Almaty reported an increase in the number of people attending services and religious education during the reporting period.

The Government maintained a list of 73 nontraditional religious groups during the reporting period, including the Hare Krishna movement, the Baha'is, and the Unification Church. Government officials reported a notable increase in registrations of congregations and missionaries affiliated with South Korean Christian churches during the reporting period.

According to government statistics, there were 334 foreign missionaries in the country as of January 2005. The majority of registered missionaries identify themselves as Christian, with many coming from South Korea, Russia, and other former Soviet countries. While there were only 12 registered Muslim foreign missionaries, more are believed to be active in the southern regions of the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the various denominations worship largely without government interference; however, local and regional officials attempted on occasion to limit or control the practice of religion by several groups, including nontraditional religious communities. The Constitution defines the country as a secular state and provides the right to decline religious affiliation. However, the Government recently enacted National Security Amendments that affect a wide range of codes and laws and place limits on religious freedom, including requiring missionaries and religious groups to register. The amendments give government officials the right to suspend activities of religious groups. The Government continued to express publicly its support for religious tolerance and diversity.

As amended, the National Religion Law explicitly requires religious organizations to register with the Government; however, it continues to provide that all persons are free to practice their religion "alone or together with others." Prior to the amendments, the law required those religious organizations that wished to be accorded the status of legal entities to register. That status is required to buy or rent property, hire employees, or engage in other legal transactions. To register, a religious organization must have at least 10 members and submit an application to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). In practice, most religious communities choose to register with the Government and are registered without difficulties.

The extremist Islamist political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) is banned and its members are subject to arrest and imprisonment for subversion. HT promotes hate and praises acts of terrorism, although it maintains that it is committed to nonviolence. The party's virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western literature calls for the overthrow of secular governments, including those in Central Asia, to be replaced with a world-wide Islamic government called the Caliphate. Because HT is primarily a political, not a religious, organization and because of its encouragement of terrorism, authorities' actions to restrict HT and prosecute HT in accordance with international legal norms are not a restriction on religious freedom, per se.

In 2004, the MOJ designed and implemented a new, one-step registration process, and religious groups noted that registration became more efficient during the re-

porting period. However, local government officials, particularly in remote locations, often insisted that religious organizations also register at the local level, despite the fact that the law specifies that registration at the national level with the MOJ is sufficient. Now Article 9 of the Religion Law explicitly requires registration of local religious organizations with the regional office of the MOJ.

The Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (“Council of Churches”) has a policy of not seeking or accepting registration in former Soviet countries. In 1961, the Council of Churches split from the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, which has no objection to registering its congregations.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses Religious Center reported that oblast authorities registered its branch in Northern Kazakhstan Oblast in January 2004 (the 2004 Human Rights Report reported in error that the branch had not been registered) after it had unsuccessfully attempted to register since 1997.

As in previous years, government officials frequently expressed concerns regarding the potential spread of political and religious extremism in the south of the country. The Committee for National Security (KNB) has characterized the fight against “religious extremism” as a top priority of the internal intelligence service. An Extremism Law that came into effect in February 2005 applies to religious and other organizations. Under this law, the Government has broad latitude in identifying and designating a group as an extremist organization, banning a designated group’s activities, and criminalizing membership in a banned organization. On March 28, 2005, the HT political movement was the first organization banned under the Extremism Law. At the end of the reporting period, no apolitical religious organizations had been outlawed as extremist.

The Elections Law prohibits political parties based upon ethnic, gender, or religious affiliation.

In 2002, the Constitutional Council specifically ruled that a legislative provision requiring the Muslim Spiritual Association, a national Muslim organization headed by the Chief Mufti, to approve the registration of any Muslim group violated the constitutional principle separating church and state. The Council also noted more broadly that the amendments might infringe on the constitutional right to spread religious beliefs freely.

In an early 2005 meeting with imams from throughout the country, President Nursultan Nazarbayev reportedly stated that Sunni mosques should affiliate with the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Kazakhstan (SAMK), led by the Chief Mufti in Almaty. In May 2005, the press reported that the akim (governor) of Southern Kazakhstan oblast, along with heads of regional law enforcement agencies, met with imams of mosques in that oblast in an effort to pressure nonaligned imams and congregations to join the SAMK to ensure liturgical orthodoxy. There were unconfirmed reports that other oblast akims held similar meetings with imams to encourage affiliation with SAMK.

Neither law nor regulation prohibits foreign missionary activity. Foreign missionaries, like all visitors, are required to register with the Migration Police and indicate the purpose of their stay. Under July 2005 amendments to the Religion Law, Kazakhstani and foreign missionaries are required to register annually with the MOJ, and provide information as to religious affiliation, territory of missionary work, and time period for that work. All religious literature and other materials to be used to support missionary work must be provided with the registration application; use of materials not vetted during the registration process is illegal. In addition, missionaries must produce registration documents for the sponsoring registered religious organization and a power of attorney from the sponsoring organization to allow the missionary to work on its behalf. The MOJ may refuse registration to missionaries whose work would be inconsistent with the law, including laws prohibiting incitement of interethnic or interreligious hatred. The Constitution requires foreign religious associations to conduct their activities, including appointing the heads of religious associations, “in coordination with appropriate state institutions.” Foreigners are permitted under the law to register religious organizations; however, they generally are required to list a majority of local citizens among the 10 founders of the organization.

During the reporting period, two groups reported difficulty in obtaining registration for their missionaries and several religious groups reported that foreign missionaries experienced visa difficulties. There were credible reports that foreign missionaries of several religions were denied appropriate visas to allow them to legally conduct missionary activity, and were instead denied visas or issued tourist visas, the terms of which prohibit missionary activity. In other cases, several Christian and Muslim missionaries reported that visas were issued for shorter terms than in previous years. Some foreign missionaries reported good cooperation with local and national authorities.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Children must attend secular schools through high school; some secular schools are private. Home-schooling is not permitted, except for children at the pre-school level. Parents may enroll children in supplemental religious education provided by registered religious organizations.

The National Security Amendments include a provision that religious training of a child shall not cause damage to a child's all-around development or physical or "moral" health. The amendment provides no further clarification of how such damage should be judged and which agency would be the competent authority to make such a determination. The current law does not allow religious groups to educate children without approval from the Ministry of Education, making lack of such approval a ground for refusing to register a religious organization whose charter includes provisions for religious education. The Ministry of Education issued a circular in early 2005 instructing teachers to be alert in detecting behavior that indicated that children were being exposed to political or religious extremism. The Government exempted registered religious organizations from taxes on both church collections and income from certain religious activities. The Government has donated buildings, land, and provided other assistance for the construction of new mosques, synagogues, and Russian Orthodox churches.

The Government invited the national leaders of the two largest religious groups, Islam and Russian Orthodoxy, to participate jointly in some state events; Roman Catholic and Jewish leaders have been included in such events as well. Leaders of other faiths, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and other nontraditional religious groups, at times also have participated in some events.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the amended Religion Law, the Government may deny registration based upon an insufficient number of adherents or inconsistencies between the provisions of a religious organization's charter and the law. Under the Law on Public Associations, a registered organization, including a religious group, may have all activities suspended by court order for a period of 3 to 6 months for defiance of the Constitution or laws, or for systematic pursuit of activities that contradict the charter and bylaws of the organization as registered. In February 2005, Parliament amended this law to empower police, prosecutors and citizens to petition a court to suspend the activities of a registered organization on the basis of failure to remove violations or repeated violations of the law. This amendment was passed at the same time the Extremism Law was adopted.

During a suspension, the organization is prohibited from speaking with the media on behalf of the organization; holding meetings, gatherings or services; and undertaking financial transactions other than meeting ongoing contractual obligations, such as paying salaries. In previous years, the Government typically claimed that religious groups' charters did not meet the requirements of the law when refusing or significantly delaying registration. Often authorities cited discrepancies between Russian and Kazakh language versions of groups' charters or referred charters for expert examination.

Article 375 of the Administrative Code allows authorities to suspend the activities or fine the leaders of unregistered groups. Recent amendments to the Religion Law incorporate language consistent with Article 375. In the few administrative cases brought under Article 375 during the period covered by this report, prior to the addition of explicit language on registration to the Religion Law, the court of first instance usually acquitted the accused.

Procurators have the right to inspect organizations registered with state bodies once a year; there were no reports that these inspections, when they occurred, were overly intrusive or were considered harassment by any religious groups inspected. Where religious groups operated as legal entities, such as by running collective farms and restaurants or operating orphanages, authorities conducted health, sanitation, and other inspections relevant to the nature of the entities' operations. These inspections also provided the authorities with information about the registration status of the groups being inspected.

Although the national Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center noted generally positive relations with the national Government, the group alleged several incidents of harassment by local governments. Although local Jehovah's Witnesses organizations are formally registered at the national level and in 13 oblasts, the Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center has attempted unsuccessfully to register in Atyrau Oblast since 2001. Their most recent application was turned down in March 2004 for alleged discrepancies between the Kazakh and Russian language versions of their charter. It claimed that city officials sometimes denied the group permits to rent stadiums and other large public or private sites for religious meetings. However, the

Center also reported that government treatment of these requests varied. No other religious groups have reported similar instances of occasionally being denied permits.

There were no reports that local representatives of the KNB or police officials disrupted meetings in private homes during the period covered by this report. Several groups did report that local law enforcement representatives attended their services, although their presence generally was not considered disruptive. The Council of Churches reported that in April 2004, local police disrupted a church service in Arkalyk by videotaping the service without the congregants' permission.

During the reporting period, the Council of Churches noted several court cases against churchgoers for participating in the activities of an unregistered group. When individuals were found to be guilty of violating section 375 of the Administrative Code, courts imposed a fine. Council of Churches members usually refused to pay fines levied by courts for non-registration and there were no reports of the Government forcing payment.

In May 2005, according to news source Forum 18, a court in Zaisan fined Baptist leader Igor Isakov \$129.50 (17,478 tenge) for refusing to register his congregation. In July 2004, Vilgelm Dik, also a member of the Council of Churches, was found guilty of violating the Administrative Code by not registering his congregation, and was fined \$47.65 (6,433 tenge). Dik did not appeal or pay the fine during the reporting period. In late 2004, Aleksei Buka, of Karganada oblast, was fined \$47.65 (6,433 tenge) for belonging to an unregistered religious group; his case was overturned on appeal in March 2005. The congregations to which Isakov, Dik and Buka belonged maintained their refusal to register. In Nikolayevka, Almaty Oblast, Aleksandr Kalmakov was fined for his group's failure to register; he reported that court bailiffs harassed him to pay the fine early in 2004, but he still refused to pay the fine at the end of 2004. There were no new developments in the 2002–2003 case of Eastern Kazakhstan Oblast Council of Churches Baptist pastor Sergey Nizhegorodtsev, who refused to pay a fine levied for failure to register his congregation.

No court cases against unregistered local Jehovah's Witnesses congregations were reported. The Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center has attempted unsuccessfully to register in Atyrau Oblast since 2001.

Although the Hare Krishna movement was registered at the national level, followers reported some continued local government and police harassment during the year. In August 2004, the Hare Krishna community in Almaty oblast held an annual convention with foreign guests. Two weeks before the event began, the community filed a formal request with oblast authorities to hold the gathering, but received no response. The Hare Krishna community reported that seven foreign invitees were briefly detained and released with a warning for violation of the immigration law. However, in contrast to previous years, no Hare Krishna followers were deported during the convention. During this weeklong gathering, law enforcement representatives visited the convention on a daily basis, conducting health, sanitation, and other inspections of the premises to ensure compliance with the law.

According to Hare Krishna leaders, the authorities made frequent inspections of the Krishnas' settlement outside Almaty. In September 2004, the Hare Krishna farm was the subject of 11 inspections by different government agencies including the police, fire protection service, sanitary agency, environment protection agency and land committee, and subsequently fined for different violations of the law. The Hare Krishnas admitted several violations, which they attempted to rectify, but maintained that they had been subjected to closer scrutiny than their neighbors. The Hare Krishnas were subject to litigation related to their ownership and use of a collective farm in Almaty Oblast. In February 2005, one of two outstanding lawsuits was settled in favor of the Hare Krishna commune, and the other case was dismissed without prejudice. Notwithstanding these inspections and lawsuits, Hare Krishna leaders reported that in general, conditions for their community improved during the year.

In 2003, the SAMK was reported to have removed from their mosques five imams who participated in a U.S. Government-sponsored Community Connections exchange program to the United States. Following a request by the U.S. Ambassador, the five imams were reinstated in their positions.

Observers also believe that security officials informally monitor some religious activity, particularly Muslim imams' sermons; however no suggestion has been made that any monitoring had the character of interference or harassment.

The Ahmadi Muslim community reported difficulties in obtaining visas and registration for foreign missionaries invited to the country throughout the reporting period, primarily in South Kazakhstan Oblast. In early 2005, after numerous requests by the Ahmadi community, foreign missionary Asan Takhir Sayid Bukhari was eventually granted a three-month visa and allowed to register after numerous ap-

peals to local authorities. In 2002, Bukhari encountered visa and residency registration problems that were resolved in early 2004 through the intervention of government officials in Astana.

Both the national Government and the national Muslim organization SAMK deny that there is any official connection between them. However, the Government has proposed several times in recent years, in the form of amendments to the Religion Law, that the organization assume a quasi-official role by determining which Muslim groups be allowed to register with authorities and by approving the construction of new mosques. In 2002, the Constitutional Council ruled that these provisions of the proposed amendments were unconstitutional; however, several akims were reported to have exerted pressure on imams and mosques to align themselves with the SAMK.

Several religious groups, including the Hare Krishnas and Jehovah's Witnesses, reported that they had been the subject of a news account portraying them, or non-traditional religions in general, as a threat to security or society. Some of the news accounts appeared in government-controlled media.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

As in the previous reporting period, there were no reports of the prolonged detention of members of religious organizations for proselytizing. On occasion the authorities took action against groups engaged in proselytizing; however, such actions were limited to the confiscation of religious literature and brief detentions.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite legislative setbacks during the reporting period, the country remains a leader in the former Soviet Union for its encouragement of religious tolerance and its respect for the rights of religious minorities. Religious leaders praised the role the Government played in ensuring their right to peaceful practice of their religious beliefs. Some perceived the Chairman of the Secretariat of the Council on Relations with Religious Communities and the Ombudsman's Office as advocates for religious freedom within the Government.

National and regional officials continued to be active in reducing restrictions on religious freedom and harassment of religious groups by local officials. The frequency of higher-level intervention has generally reduced harassment of religious groups at the local level. During the period covered by this report, activism by national and regional officials continued to bring resolution to longstanding conflicts between nontraditional religious groups and local authorities. The resolution of two court cases against the Hare Krishna commune in Almaty reflected an equitable application of the law.

Government officials in Astana reported that an oblast-level commission was formed in early 2004 to look into the multiple instances of harassment in the past several years. Hare Krishna followers at the commune said there has been a reduction in government harassment since that time.

President Nazarbayev announced that he would continue his "Peace and Harmony" initiative by hosting the second Congress of World Religions in Astana in the autumn of 2006 and inviting several previously unrepresented groups. The President remains engaged with international religious leaders and communities. In June 2004, he met with Rabbi Arthur Schneier of the American-based Appeal of Conscience foundation during his visit to the country.

The openings of two new large religious facilities in Astana were well received. A new synagogue opened in September 2004, followed by the opening of the Grand Mosque in March 2005. High-ranking government officials participated in opening ceremonies for both facilities.

According to government statistics, the number of registered religious groups has risen steadily over the last few years. In January 2005, there were 3,259 registered religious groups, compared with 3,157 in 2004 and 3,016 in 2003. The Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, for example, grew from 254 registered affiliated groups in 2003 to 291 in 2005. Nontraditional "charismatic" Protestant congregations rose from 401 in 2003 to 450 in 2005.

The Government made efforts to promote religious tolerance in its ranks. In April 2004, the Ministry of Internal Affairs invited the country's Chief Rabbi to give seminars to its police officers on sensitivity to religious minorities. Human rights training provided to law enforcement officers by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in cooperation with the government included information on religious rights under the law.

There were no reports of incidents of anti-Semitism by the Government. In August 2004, the Chief Rabbi of Kazakhstan, addressing an international religious conference in Brussels, stated that in 10 years in the country he had never faced a single case of anti-Semitism. He praised the Government of Kazakhstan for its pro-active protection of the Jewish community. Other than the actions of members of the extremist HT political movement, who printed and distributed leaflets that supported anti-Semitism among other beliefs, there were no reports of anti-Semitic incitement or acts during the year.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The country is multiethnic, with a long tradition of tolerance and secularism. Since independence the number of mosques and churches has increased greatly. The population, particularly in rural areas, is sometimes wary of nontraditional religions.

In October 2004, the media reported a conflict between missionaries from Grace Rakhim Christian Missionary Center and local Muslims in a village in Akmola Oblast. The missionaries, who identified themselves as Presbyterian Christians, were reportedly threatened, beaten, and exiled from the village when they attempted to convert local residents.

Several Members of Parliament were quoted in the press expressing suspicion of nontraditional religions, including the Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical Christian movements. Leaders of the four traditional religions, Islam, Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Judaism, reported general acceptance and tolerance that was not always enjoyed by minority religions. Other than the report of violence against missionaries from Grace Rakhim, there were no reports of this mistrust leading to violence.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials emphasized that bilateral cooperation on economic and security issues is a complement to, not a substitute for, meaningful progress on human rights, including religious freedom. The Ambassador and Embassy officers remained heavily engaged in dialogue with the Government to encourage assurance that any legislation relating to religious freedom be drafted through a transparent legislative process and that it reflect the country's international commitments to respect individuals' rights to peaceful expression of religion.

U.S. officials expressed concern at high levels over the Extremism Law prior to its passage. Following passage of the law, U.S. officials remained engaged with the Government to encourage that the law be implemented in a manner that least restricted religious practice.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officials coordinated with other embassies and international human rights organizations to promote public debate on several pieces of draft legislation that had implications for the religious community, including proposed National Security Amendments and a proposed Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Law. U.S. government officials at the Embassy and in Washington prepared analyses of draft laws and used these as a basis for informal discussions and formal demarches to the Government. The Ambassador gave several interviews in which he publicly reiterated the U.S. position against legislation that did not appear to meet international standards of protecting religious freedom and other fundamental rights.

The Embassy maintained contact with a broad range of religious communities and reported on violations of their constitutional and human rights. U.S. Department of State officials met with government officials and members of faith-based groups in the country and Embassy officials raised several cases of local harassment with government officials, who generally worked to resolve these cases, ensuring an equitable application of the laws. Senior government officials from Washington, including the Deputy Secretary and the Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, met with senior government officials to raise religious freedom concerns related to several pieces of legislation that were being considered by the Parliament,

including the Extremism Law and National Security Amendments that were passed during this reporting period. In October 2004, a staff member of Office of Religious Freedom met with government officials, religious leaders and human rights advocates to discuss the proposed Extremism Law.

In November 2004, during Ramadan, the Ambassador and Embassy officials hosted separate Iftars, or Auz Ashars, in Almaty and Astana for local Muslim leaders, Islamic scholars, and diplomats from Muslim countries. Embassy officials regularly attended public events in support of the religious community, in addition to participating in roundtables and other public debates on issues of religious freedom and tolerance. U.S. officials in country and in Washington were in regular contact with NGOs following religious freedom issues, including the Almaty Helsinki Committee and the Kazakhstan Bureau of International Human Rights and Rule of Law.

During the reporting period, the U.S. added a religious component to its overall development strategy for the country. Implementing organizations and a recently hired regional Religion, State and Society Specialist, based in Tashkent, have been working to increase outreach to religious communities in Shymkent. This included attending the Almaty Iftar/Auz Ashar during Ramadan and organizing a media tour of implementing organizations that publicized the scope of the contributions, including civil society development, that these partners provide to the country. In addition, Mission officials held meetings with implementing organizations and staff to discuss what role religious leaders can play in development efforts and to encourage partners to reach out to local religious leaders in their work.

The Embassy conducted exchange programs for religious leaders and human rights observers during the period covered by this report. In October 2004, government officials and human rights advocates participated in a program that focused on human rights monitoring, including promotion of religious freedom. Participants were briefed on the U.S. legal framework of religious rights protection, met with religious freedom advocates, and toured the U.S. Holocaust Museum.

In July 2004, the Embassy sponsored a 3-week exchange program on "Islam in America" for 10 Muslim leaders and teachers. The visit included meetings with U.S. government officials, academics, NGO leaders, and American Muslim community leaders. In 2003, the Embassy sponsored similar visits to the United States of groups of imams and other Muslim religious leaders from Kyzyl-Orda, Zhambyl, and Southern Kazakhstan Oblasts. They were also hosted by U.S. families and participated in religious services. In 2004 and 2005, as a follow-up to these programs, the Embassy co-sponsored several "alumni reunions" including a lunch hosted by the Ambassador and a regional conference featuring an American keynote speaker.

In February 2005, the Embassy hosted an expert to speak in Almaty and Shymkent on religion in America and the African-American Muslim community. This program reached a wide audience through public appearances, academic lectures, and media interviews.

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government restricts the activities of radical Islamic groups that it considers to be threats to stability and security.

The Constitution provides for a secular state and the separation of church/mosque and state. The Government does not support any religion.

On March 24, 2005, President Akayev and his family fled the country after opposition demonstrators overran the main government building in Bishkek. Prime Minister Tanaev resigned. On March 28, the Parliament confirmed Kurmanbek Bakiyev as the Prime Minister and Acting President. The new government so far has indicated that it has no plans to rescind any policies of the Akayev government regarding religious freedom.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued steps to monitor and restrict Islamist groups that it considered a threat. In April 2004, then-Prime Minister Tanaev signed a decree and plan of action aimed at "combating religious extremism" for 2004 to 2005. The decree outlines efforts of various government agencies directed at detection and prevention of terrorism and religious extremism, including the creation of a database of foreign religious extremist organizations, conducting an information campaign, and preventing inter- and intra-faith conflicts. In April 2005, the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) confirmed that the decree and plan

of action remain in force and are being followed by the SCRA and other government agencies.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Some tensions occurred between Muslims and former Muslims who had converted to other faiths.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as a part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy continued to monitor the progress of the draft law on religion and maintained contact with government officials with regard to religious affairs. At numerous times during the period covered by the report, Embassy representatives met with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups, and with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that monitor religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 77,181 square miles and its population is approximately 5.1 million. The latest official data from the National Statistics Committee reflected the following ethnic breakdown of the population: Kyrgyz, 67.4 percent; Uzbeks, 14.2 percent; Russians, 10.3 percent; Dungans (ethnic Chinese Muslims), 1.1 percent; Uighurs (ethnic Turkic Muslims), 1 percent; and other ethnicities, 6.4 percent.

Islam is the most widely practiced faith. Official sources estimate that up to 80 percent of the inhabitants are Muslims. The majority of Muslims are Sunni, and there are only a few Shi'a in the country (approximately 1,000). According to the SCRA, as of May 2005, there were an estimated 1,611 mosques, of which 1,592 are registered. There also are seven institutes for higher Islamic teaching. According to recent official estimates, approximately 11 percent of the population is Russian Orthodox, although some experts believe it could be as low as 8 percent. The country has 44 Russian Orthodox churches, 1 Russian Orthodox monastery for women, and 1 parochial school. The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates 20 churches throughout the country. Jews, Buddhists, and Roman Catholics account for approximately 3 percent of the population, and they practice their religions openly in one synagogue, one temple, and three churches. In addition there are 265 registered Protestant houses of worship and 12 registered Baha'i houses of worship. The small Jewish congregation in Bishkek organizes informal cultural studies and humanitarian services, chiefly food assistance for its elderly. There also are syncretistic religious practices. Most notably, there is a Baptist church in the Naryn region whose followers are predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz. While they worship as Christians, they have incorporated Muslim modes of prayer into their Christian rituals. In the past year the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) also registered the Church of Scientology, the "Concordia-2" Lutheran Church, the Messianic Jewish Community "Beyt Jeshua," the religious group "Chaplain Service" and the religious group "Logos International Central Aging." There is no official estimate of the number of atheists.

Islam is practiced widely throughout the country in both urban and rural areas. Russian Orthodoxy typically is concentrated in the cities with a larger ethnic Russian population. The other faiths also are practiced more commonly in the cities where their smaller communities tend to be concentrated. There is a correlation between ethnicity and religion; ethnic Kyrgyz are primarily Muslims, while ethnic Russians usually belong to either the Russian Orthodox Church or one of the Protestant denominations. While the majority of the population claims to follow Islam, a significant number of Muslims appear to be only nominal believers and identify with the faith out of historical or ethnic allegiance. A significant number of Russian Orthodox adherents also appear to be only nominal believers.

A number of missionary groups operate. The SCRA has registered missionaries from the Republic of Korea, Great Britain, China, the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. They represent an estimated 20 religions and denominations, including Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Korean Presbyterians. According to the SCRA, since 1996, the SCRA has registered approximately 1,103 missionaries, of whom approximately 851 were Christian and 252 were Muslim. During the period covered by this report, 145 missionaries conducted activities, of whom 113 are Christian and 32 are Muslim. According to official statistics, since independence, authorities ordered approximately 20 missionaries, who disseminated dogma inconsistent with the traditional customs of local Muslims, to leave the country. However, during the reporting period, no missionaries were expelled or asked to leave the country or denied registration. All of those missionaries expelled represented var-

ious “totalitarian sects,” or groups the SCRA considers incompatible with the standard principles of traditional world religions.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion; however, the Government at times restricted this right in practice, in particular for Muslim groups it considered to be a threat. The Constitution provides for a secular state and for the separation of church/mosque and state, and the Government does not support any particular religion. Article 8 of the Constitution prohibits the formation of political parties on religious and ethnic grounds, as well as activities of religious organizations that jeopardize the State, constitutional system, or national security. Article 82 of the Constitution provides the Constitutional Court with the authority to determine the constitutionality of religious organizations.

The Government recognizes three Muslim holy days (Noorus; Kurman Ait or Eid al-Adha; and Orozo Ait or Eid al-Fitr) and one Russian Orthodox holy day (Christmas, which is observed on January 7 in accordance with the Russian Orthodox calendar) as national holidays. The President and the Government send greetings to the followers of the Muslim and Orthodox faiths on their major religious holy days, and the greetings are printed in the mass media.

The SCRA promotes religious tolerance, protects freedom of conscience, and oversees laws on religion. Members of the Commission are appointed by the Prime Minister. A 1997 Presidential Decree requires the registration of all religious organizations with the SCRA, which in turn must recognize the registrant as a religious organization. Unregistered religious organizations are prohibited from actions such as renting space and holding religious services, although many do hold regular services without government interference. Organizations applying for registration must have at least 10 members who are adult citizens and submit an application form, organizational charter, minutes of an institutional meeting, and a list of founding members. Each congregation of a religious group must register separately. A religious organization then must complete the registration process with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to obtain status as a legal entity, which is necessary to own property, open bank accounts, and otherwise engage in contractual activities. If a religious organization engages in commercial activity, it is required to pay taxes. In practice the MOJ has never registered a religious organization without prior registration by the SCRA. The registration process with the SCRA is often cumbersome, taking one month on average, but in the past sometimes took up to several years. According to SCRA regulations, registration is rejected if a religious organization does not comply with the law or is a threat to national security, social stability, interethnic and interdenominational harmony, public order, health, or morality. Applicants whose registration is rejected may re-apply and appeal to the courts. There are signs that the SCRA is improving the situation and over the past year has registered several new entities that had trouble registering previously. The Church of Jesus Christ (not to be confused with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Mormon) reported that the SCRA registered all six affiliates that attempted to register during the reporting period.

The Government created a website in 2004 documenting the religious organizations currently operating. According to the SCRA, there are over 2,044 registered religious entities, including mosques, churches, foundations, NGOs of a religious nature, and religious educational institutions. Of these, 309 are Christian. The SCRA reported that its staff continued to travel around the country to help unregistered religious entities prepare applications for registration; according to the SCRA, 46 new religious entities (17 mosques and 29 Christian churches) were registered during the period covered by this report. Although there has been a history of several groups, including the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), having difficulties registering, almost all, including the RCC, were eventually registered, except for the Hare Krishnas.

The RCC has been registered since 2002. The RCC in Bishkek first attained legal status under Soviet law in 1969. The Holy See established the Catholic Mission in the country in 1997, and a representative from the Vatican visited in 2001 to discuss registration of the Church with the SCRA. In 2002, the SCRA approved the Catholic Mission’s application for registration, and registration was finalized in October 2002.

The Church of Jesus Christ is the country’s largest Protestant church with approximately 18 affiliates and an estimated 11,000 members, of whom 30 percent are ethnic Kyrgyz. At the end of the period covered in this report, the main church in Bishkek was registered, along with 13 of 18 affiliates. The remaining five affiliates

were preparing applications for registration but had not submitted them at the end of the period covered in this report.

Members of registered religious groups may undergo alternative military service; it was reported in the press that about 3,000 persons annually apply.

Missionary groups of a variety of faiths operate freely, although they are required to register with the Government.

The Government expressly forbids the teaching of religion (or atheism) in public schools. In 2001, the Government instructed the SCRA to draw up programs for training clergy and to prepare methodologies for teaching about religions in public schools. These instructions came in response to concerns about the spread of Wahhabism and what the Government considers unconventional religious sects. The SCRA turned to a number of religious organizations for their ideas on introducing religious education. The reaction of the organizations generally was negative, as they preferred to retain responsibility for the religious education of their adherents. The SCRA indicates that it is still developing a curriculum to teach about religions, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and several academic institutions; however, the program has not yet been implemented because of lack of funding. Volunteers visited villages in the south to teach traditional Islamic values. In 2003, the SCRA and the State Muftiate granted the Islamic Institute the status of a university, which gave it authority over other Islamic institutes in the country and allowed it to develop a more standardized curriculum. In 2004, the Islamic University began a program to oversee all Islamic schools in the country, including madrassahs. As part of the program, the Islamic Institute oversees curriculum development and tries to maintain a more standardized curriculum among all Islamic schools. The Islamic Institute also said that one of its goals is to check the spread of extremist religious teaching. This program continued into the reporting period. The Government worked through the SCRA to promote interfaith dialogue and encourage religious tolerance. The SCRA hosted meetings of religious groups to bring the faiths together in open forums, and it assisted them in working together on programs for the protection of the poor and the elderly.

Since 2001 the Government has worked with representatives of various religious faiths and NGOs on a draft law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," which is ostensibly a response to concerns about terrorism and other illegal activities committed by groups disguised as religious organizations. The initial draft included compulsory registration of religious bodies, a prohibition against unregistered religious activity, and tight control over religious activity deemed "destructive." The Parliament worked with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to revise the draft law in an effort to ensure that it respected the Government's OSCE obligations and would allow the free practice of religion. In 2002, the Central Asian Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a statement strongly opposing the draft law, citing concerns that its passage would result in a flood of foreign missionaries. Parliament was still preparing the draft law.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continued to express public concern about groups that it viewed as extremist either because of radical religious or political agendas. The Government was particularly concerned about the threat of political Islam, whose followers (Islamists) it labels "Wahhabis." The Government perceives Islamists to be a threat to national stability, particularly in the south, and fears that Islamists seek to overthrow the secular government and establish an Islamic theocracy. Although they have not recurred, armed incursions in 1999 and 2000 by members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a terrorist organization, increased the Government's concern regarding political Islam and the actions of militant Islamic groups. In contrast to previous reporting periods, the Government expressed no concerns over the growing number of Christian groups. In December 2004, police raided houses in Osh and the Aravan and Nookat districts, areas of traditional Islamic beliefs, following a grenade blast in Osh in November 2004. In November 2004, police took four men into detention for failing to supply identity papers and one of the men allegedly threw a hand grenade to escape. Officials maintained the incident was perpetrated by Islamic extremists. Local human rights observers disputed these connections, and alleged that the incident was being used to discriminate against Muslims as well as the Uzbek minority.

In 2003, the Supreme Court sustained the verdict by the Lenin District Court of Bishkek, which banned four political organizations, which the Government termed "religious," for extremism and alleged ties to international terrorist organizations: Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the Islamic Party of Turkestan, the Organization for Freeing Eastern Turkestan, and the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party. In 2002 the Muftiat announced the formation of an expert commission to review and standardize Islamic

educational literature printed and distributed in the country. During the period covered in this report, the commission continued to review prior to publication new books on Islamic themes.

The Church of Jesus Christ reported that a number of ongoing bureaucratic and legal problems remained unresolved as in the previous reporting year. Although the church had some success in obtaining registration of its affiliates, and on obtaining a favorable court ruling on the taxability of its membership donations, it continued to experience difficulties in obtaining from the SCRA and the Mayor's office the title to the land on which the main church in Bishkek is located.

In 2003, at the request of the Procurator General's office, the SCRA suspended the activities of the Unification Church, which had been registered as a social, rather than a religious organization, and had been granted semi-official status. According to the SCRA, the Procurator General's office requested suspension of the activity of the Unification Church because it had not, as the law requires, indicated in its registration papers to which world religion it adhered. Despite the suspension, which was upheld in an appeal to the Bishkek city court, the church is still active.

In May 2003, Asan Erkinbayev, the head of the local administration, closed 7 of the 12 mosques in the Karadarya district of the Jalalabad region, claiming that they were on state-owned land and that their imams were preaching contradictory views. All of the closed mosques were converted into commercial or public buildings. However, in June 2005, both the SCRA and an official with the Jalalabad Oblast Kaziate confirmed that all of the mosques which were closed had been reopened and were functioning normally.

Although the Government monitored, including filming, both Protestant and Muslim religious groups in the past, there were no reports of such surveillance during the period covered by this report. There were unconfirmed reports that law enforcement officials monitored the activities of missionaries.

In April 2004, the Government signed a decree and plan of action instructing the National Security Service (SNB) to propose measures to "restrict and prevent the activities of missionaries who propagate religious fundamentalism and extremism as well as reactionary and Shi'ite ideas." Among the groups to be restricted were members of the Ahmadiyya community, a Muslim proselytizing movement, which is based in Pakistan, and is considered un-Islamic by many traditional Muslims. SCRA officials assured the Ahmadis that their inclusion on the list of extremist groups was a mistake and that the Government would not target the group. There were no subsequent reports of harassment. In April 2005, the SCRA confirmed that the Ahmadis were operating throughout the country and said that neither the SCRA nor the government had taken action to restrict their activities. In May 2005, the SCRA reported that the Ahmadis had been registered as a religious organization.

Although in June 2004, then-Prime Minister Tanaev announced that the Government would create a special board to review religious literature, the Government has taken no action to date.

Some conservative Muslims in Karasuu in the southern Osh region had objected to the presence of a male obstetrician in a local maternity hospital, but this is no longer a prominent community issue, as those who wish to see a female obstetrician may now do so.

The SCRA stated that students, who, for religious reasons, choose to wear clothing that would indicate adherence to a particular religion, may attend religious schools. In contrast to the previous year, there were no known cases of children being prohibited from wearing a hijab in school. There were no other reports of harassment of observant Muslim children by teachers in schools. In spring 2003, administrators in several schools in the Osh and Jalalabad regions prohibited pupils from wearing the hijab in school. However, when girls at two schools in Jalalabad Oblast ignored the order, no action was taken to stop them. No further cases of hijabs being banned or of harassment of observant believers in schools have been reported since 2003. There were no reports of further incidents of village elders calling for the expulsion of Christian converts as occurred in earlier years.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reported abuses of religious freedom.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of the two major religions, Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church, respect each other's major holidays and exchange holiday greetings.

There was no evidence of widespread societal discrimination or violence against members of different religious groups; however, there was evidence of periodic tension in rural areas between conservative Muslims and foreign Christian missionaries and individuals from traditionally Muslim ethnic groups who converted to other faiths. Both Muslim and Russian Orthodox spiritual leaders criticized the proselytizing activities of nontraditional Christian groups; however, the press reported in October 2004 that at least one Muslim spiritual leader of the Jalalabad region, Haji Dilmurod, intervened to prevent the stoning of a group of converts to Jehovah's Witnesses by local youths. According to Dilmurod, a group of local youths was discussing plans to stone a group of Jehovah's Witnesses who were driving around their village, proselytizing to villagers through loudspeakers on the roof of a truck. Dilmurod prevented the local youths from attacking the Jehovah's Witnesses, and asked the Jehovah's Witnesses to be more discreet in their proselytizing. No further incidents were reported between the two groups. During the period covered by this report, there were no acts of violence, harassment, or vandalism reported against Jewish people, community institutions, schools, synagogues or cemeteries.

In April 2005, a group of Islamic extremists attacked a rehabilitation center for former convicts near Bishkek. The group attacked the center after they mistakenly assumed that it was a front for Christian missionaries. Local police and SNB officials responded quickly to defend the center, which continues to operate normally.

According to the SCRA, Muslims made up 84 percent of the total population in 2001, and that figure had declined to 79.3 percent in 2004. There were reports in the past that individuals in some towns appealed to local leaders or circulated petitions calling for Protestant Christians to be expelled. In addition, a number of Kyrgyz television stations in the past broadcast programs disparaging Protestant churches and the Church of Jesus Christ, calling for the Government to ban such groups. However, no similar calls were made or programs aired during the period covered by this report.

In previous years, it was reported that Protestant missionaries working in the south aroused particular concern among some devout local Uzbeks, and that Muslims were angered that the authorities monitored and arrested alleged Islamic extremists but did not interfere in the work of Protestant groups. However, no similar incidents were reported during the period covered in this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy continued to monitor the progress of the draft law on religion and maintained contact with government officials with regard to religious affairs. Embassy representatives met with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups, and with NGOs monitoring religious freedom.

In November 2004, during Ramadan, the Ambassador again hosted the annual Iftar for Muslim leaders and government officials. On January 21, 2005, the Ambassador addressed, in the Kyrgyz language, thousands of Muslims who gathered to pray on the main square of Bishkek for Eid al-Adha. His speech, which highlighted the importance of respect for different religions, received positive coverage in the largest-circulation paper in the country.

The State Department gave a grant to a combined team from Purdue, Notre Dame, and Indiana Universities to conduct a \$150,000 (6,450,000 som) citizen exchange program to develop a religious tolerance program for Muslim youth in the Nookat region of Osh Oblast. The project also focuses on developing youth sports, which won the program's strong support from the Mufti, who grew up playing volleyball and soccer in Nookat.

The Embassy also provided grants to five local NGOs to conduct after-school religious tolerance programs for Muslim youth in the more conservative rural southern regions. These programs focus on after-school activities and involve parents, religious leaders, teachers, and local officials.

A U.S. government-funded institutional partnership continued between the Social Sciences Research Council and the Islamic University in Bishkek to supplement the religious curriculum with an international curriculum to include math, English, and a course on comparative world religions and establish exchange visits between uni-

versity teachers in the two countries. Two professors from the Islamic University spent the fall 2004 semester studying at Indiana University, and two others studied at Harvard during the spring 2005 semester. They focused on Arabic language, Islamic history and comparative religions.

During the period covered by the report, the Embassy actively distributed publications about Muslim life in the United States. Interest was sparked by the February 2004, Osh TV broadcast of a 15-part documentary about Muslim life in America. Osh TV broadcast it again in March 2004 because of popular demand. In July 2004, a group of Muslim leaders from Batken province traveled to the United States to participate in an International Visitors' Program on religious tolerance and diversity. Batken contains a majority of the Muslim population in the country. The International Visitors met with Department of State officials, U.S. Muslim religious leaders, and leaders of other organizations to discuss the relationship between government and religion in the United States and to learn about the American Muslim community. The participants now are actively engaged in religious tolerance programs with school children.

The U.S.-sponsored Democracy Commission funded 53 grants to local NGOs, one of which organized courses on multicultural tolerance, comparative religious studies and prevention of radical Islam at the Islamic University of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In September 2004 the United States funded a special bus tour for religious leaders around Karakol and the Issykul Lake region. Many mosques have been built in this area in the last few years, and during the bus tour local Islamic leaders were familiarized with a number of the projects aimed at developing local communities funded by U.S. This tour was repeated after Islamic leaders had found very useful a similar tour in 2003.

LATVIA

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

There was no change in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, bureaucratic problems persisted for some minority religions.

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, lingering suspicions remained toward newer, nontraditional faiths.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 25,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at 2.4 million. The three largest faiths are Lutheranism, Catholicism, and Orthodox Christianity. Denominational membership statistics are self-reported estimates and are not completely reliable. Sizeable religious minorities include Baptists, Pentecostals, and various evangelical Protestant groups. The once large Jewish community was virtually destroyed in the Holocaust during the 1941-44 German occupation and now totals only an estimated 6,000 persons.

As of April 2005, the Justice Ministry had registered 1174 congregations. This total included: Lutheran (304), Roman Catholic (250), Orthodox (118), Baptist (93), Old Believer Orthodox (67), Seventh-day Adventist (50), Jehovah's Witnesses (13), Methodist (13), Jewish (13), Buddhist (4), Muslim (13), Hare Krishna (11), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4), and more than 100 other congregations.

Interest in religion has increased markedly since independence. However, a large percentage of these adherents do not regularly practice their faith. In 2004, churches provided the following estimates of membership to the Justice Ministry: Lutherans (539,600), Roman Catholics (428,067), Orthodox (350,000), Baptists (7,123), Old Believer Orthodox (70,635), Seventh-day Adventists (3,950), Jehovah's Witnesses (155), Methodists (1,010), Jews (667), Buddhists (108), Muslims (355), Hare Krishnas (126), and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (776). Although no reliable statistics exist, it is widely acknowledged that a significant portion of the population is atheist. Orthodox Christians, many of whom are Russian-speaking, non-citizen, permanent residents, are concentrated in the major cities, while many Catholics live in the east.

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, bureaucratic problems persist for some minority religions. There is no state religion; however, the Government distinguishes between “traditional” (Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believers, Baptists, and Jewish) and “new” religions. In practice, this has not resulted in government discrimination against any particular religion.

Jews are considered an ethnic group and listed as such in passports rather than Latvian or Russian. Under the country’s system, citizens’ passports indicate the ethnicity of the bearer only when requested by the bearer. Ethnicity is not listed on the personal information page of the passport, but is instead stamped onto a blank visa page.

December 25 is celebrated as Christmas and is a recognized national holiday. Good Friday and Easter Monday are also national holidays. The Orthodox Church has been seeking recognition of Orthodox Christmas for several years, but the Government had not adopted this proposal by the end of this reporting period.

The Latvian Lutheran Church established its own clergy education center, the Luther Academy in Riga, in 1998. The Roman Catholic Church also has its own seminary. The University of Latvia’s theological faculty is nondenominational.

There are three councils that comment on religious issues for the Government. The New Religions Consultative Council consists of doctors, academics, and an independent human rights ombudsman. It meets on an “ad hoc” basis and offers opinions on specific issues, but it does not have decision-making authority. It has not published any information or warnings concerning cults. The Traditional Religion Council aims at facilitating greater ecumenical communication, discussing matters of common concern and improving dialogue between the traditional faiths and the Government. In the past, the council has convened monthly, but it has now been replaced by a new organization called the Ecclesiastical Council. This council was organized by the previous Prime Minister in 2002 and is chaired by either the sitting Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister. It includes representatives from the major churches: Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Orthodox, Jewish, Adventist, Methodist, and Old Believers. However, the Ecclesiastical Council did not meet in plenary session during the reporting period and currently conducts business by correspondence.

Although the Government does not require the registration of religious groups, the 1995 Law on Religious Organizations accords religious organizations certain rights and privileges when they register, such as status as a separate legal entity for owning property or other financial transactions, as well as tax benefits for donors. Registration also eases the rules for public gatherings.

According to the Law on Religious Organizations, any 20 citizens or persons over the age of 18 who have been registered in the Population Register may apply to register a church. Asylum seekers, foreign staff of diplomatic missions, and those in the country temporarily in a special status may not register a religious organization. Congregations that do not belong to a registered church association must reregister each year for 10 years. Ten or more congregations of the same denomination and with permanent registration status may form a religious association. Only churches with religious association status may establish theological schools or monasteries. The decision to register a church is made by the Minister of Justice. According to Ministry of Justice officials, most registration applications are approved eventually once proper documents are submitted. In the past year, the Ministry of Justice has proposed to abolish the religious association membership requirement and reduce the new congregation registration requirement to 3 years. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Parliament had not acted on this recommendation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Law on Religious Organizations does not permit simultaneous registration of more than one religious association (church) in a single confession, and therefore, the Government does not register any splinter groups. This has resulted in the denial of registration applications of several groups, including an independent Jewish congregation, the Latvian Free Orthodox Church, and a separate Old Believers group.

In 2005, the Religious Affairs Administration again proposed amendments to the Law on Religious Organizations that would abolish restrictions on single association registration. However, neither the Latvian Ecclesiastical Council nor the Government has acted on this recommendation.

Visa regulations effective since 1999 require foreign religious workers to present either an ordination certificate or evidence of religious education that corresponds to a local bachelor's degree in theology. The visa application process, requiring letters of invitation and proof of seminary training, remains cumbersome, although the Government generally was cooperative in helping resolve difficult visa cases in favor of missionary workers.

Foreign evangelists and missionaries are permitted to hold meetings and to proselytize, but the law stipulates that only domestic religious organizations may invite them to conduct such activities. Foreign religious denominations criticized this provision.

The Law on Religious Organizations stipulates that only representatives of the traditional Christian churches (i.e., Evangelical Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believer, and Baptist Churches) may teach religion to public school students who volunteer to take the classes. The Government provides funds for this education. Students at state-supported national minority schools also may receive education on the religion "characteristic of the national minority" on a voluntary basis. Other denominations and religions that do not have their own state-supported minority schools, such as the Jewish community, may provide religious education only in private schools.

Property restitution has been substantially completed, although most religious groups, including the Lutheran, Orthodox, and Jewish communities, continued to wait for the return of some properties. The status of these remaining properties is unclear and is the subject of complicated legal and bureaucratic processes concerning ambiguous ownership, competing claims, and the destruction of the Jewish communities to which properties belonged before World War II. The Office of the Prime Minister has established a working group to address the restitution-related concerns of Latvia's religious communities. The Jewish community has expressed concern about the terms under which some properties have been restored.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Ecumenism still is a new concept in the country, and traditional religions have adopted a distinctly reserved attitude toward the concept. Although government officials encourage a broader understanding and acceptance of newer religions, many citizens continue to doubt the validity of newer, nontraditional faiths.

The Latvian Historical Commission, under the sponsorship of President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, has continued to promote Holocaust awareness throughout society. A monument to Zanis Lipke, who saved 40 Jews from the Riga ghetto, is planned for completion in 2006.

In 2003, vandals overturned tombstones and sprayed anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of Riga's New Jewish Cemetery. National leaders condemned the act and city authorities quickly repaired the damage. Similar desecrations, though on a much smaller scale, occurred in both 2004 and 2005, with similar reactions from leading local citizens. In the spring of 2005, the Orthodox rabbi of Riga was accosted, threatened, and subjected to violently anti-Semitic epithets in Old Town Riga. Many government leaders—the President in particular—have reacted to a perceived increase in public anti-Semitism by speaking out against all forms of xenophobia and appearing prominently at Holocaust-related commemoration events. The Government actively discourages anti-Semitism; nonetheless, cultural anti-Semitism—though hard to quantify—persists. Books and other publications appearing in the country that address the World War II period generally dwell on the effects that the Russian and Nazi occupations had on the state and on ethnic Latvians, often minimizing comment on the Holocaust or the country's role in it.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by the report, the U.S. Embassy worked to support the principle of religious freedom by engaging in regular exchanges with appropriate government bodies, including the Director of the Office of Religious Affairs, human rights nongovernmental organizations, and representatives of various religious confessions, including missionaries. The Embassy also held regular discussions with local immigration authorities and section meetings with the Department of Religious Affairs.

The Embassy actively supports the Latvian Historical Commission. It has funded the travel of scholars to the United States for education on ethnic and religious tolerance and of U.S. experts to the country for Historical Commission activities. In addition, the Embassy worked with the Government to develop a Holocaust education curriculum for all students in grades 9–12. The Embassy funds the training of teachers in curriculum development, the production and publication of a Holocaust education curriculum, and the preparation of teachers to teach Holocaust history and awareness. The completed Holocaust curriculum was published in late spring 2005 and, following teacher training throughout the summer, is scheduled to be implemented in the 2005–06 school year.

Embassy officials maintain an open and productive dialogue with the Government's Director of the Office of Religious Affairs. Embassy officials also meet regularly with visiting missionary groups as well as representatives of different religious confessions, both local and foreign. Officials often discuss problems certain minority religious groups had experienced at the Citizenship and Migration Department when seeking visas and residency permits.

LIECHTENSTEIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Roman Catholic Church is the official state church.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 61.7 square miles (160 square kilometers) and as of 2002, a total population of 33,863, according to the Office of the National Economy. Membership of the different religious communities is as follows: 25,730 Roman Catholics, 2,354 Protestants, 1,384 Muslims, 258 Eastern Orthodox, 72 Buddhists, 31 Jehovah's Witnesses, 18 Jews, 14 Baha'is, 13 Anglicans, 9 New Apostolics, 8 other religions, and 329 with no formal affiliation to any religious community. For 3,643 residents authorities had no indication as to their religious affiliation. The Government discontinued statistics on religious affiliation for reason of data protection. The data as of the end of 2002 were the last statistics to be collected.

There are no significant foreign missionary groups 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 Criminal Code prohibits any form of discrimination or debasement of any religion or any of its adherents. The Constitution makes the Roman Catholic Church the established church of the country and as such it enjoys the full protection of the State.

Church funding comes from the general budget, as decided by Parliament, and is not a direct "tithe" paid by the citizens. The Government gives money not only to the Roman Catholic Church but also to other denominations. The Roman Catholic and Protestant churches receive regular annual contributions from the government in proportion to membership size; smaller religious groups are eligible to apply for grants for associations of foreigners or specific projects. The Roman Catholic and

Protestant churches' finances are integrated directly into the budgets of the national and local governments. The Roman Catholic Church receives approximately \$220,000 (300,000 Swiss francs) per year, plus additional sums from the 11 communes. The relationship between the State and the Roman Catholic Church is being redefined. In 2003, the Government re-established a working group that discussed legislative reform leading to the official recognition of religious communities other than the Roman Catholic Church. In May 2004, the Government also contracted an independent study on church financing reform that is being discussed with local governments. All religious groups enjoy tax-exempt status.

The Archdiocese of Vaduz is scheduled to receive a lump sum of \$2.2 million (3 million Swiss francs) over a total of 5 years as part of a financial settlement with the Diocese of Chur (Switzerland), to which it belonged until 1997. The transaction will permit the financial separation of the dioceses from one another. The first down payment of \$740,000 (1 million Swiss francs) was transferred in December 2003. Additional payments are now being made in installments of \$300,000 (400,000 Swiss francs). The Archdiocese of Vaduz will use the funds to pay back its property loan.

In July 2004, the UNHRC expressed concern about the unequal treatment of different religious denominations in the allocation of public funds and urged the Government to review its policies to ensure an equitable distribution of these funds.

There are no significant foreign missionary groups in the country. To receive a religious-worker visa, an applicant must demonstrate that the host organization is important for the entire country. An applicant must have completed theological studies and be accredited with an acknowledged religious group. Visa requests normally are not denied and are processed in the same manner as requests from other individuals or workers.

Since 2001, the Government grants the Muslim community a residency permit for one Imam, plus one short-term residency permit for an additional Imam during Ramadan. The Government follows a policy of routinely granting visas to the Imams in exchange for the assertion of both the Turkish Association and the Islamic community to prevent religious diatribes by the Imams or the spread of religious extremism.

Confessional religious education at public schools has recently been subject to reform. At the secondary school level, parents of pupils are called upon to decide between traditional confessional religious education (provided by the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant community) and non-confessional classes on "Religion and Culture." Regarding Roman Catholic confessional education at primary schools, a working group representing the local municipalities, religious teachers (catechists), and the Department of Education has worked out an agreement with the Archbishop of Vaduz. The agreement retained the compulsory nature of confessional religious education and granted the Roman Catholic Church autonomy in setting the curriculum. With regard to oversight of religious education, the agreement gave the Archbishop the final say on employment decisions of religious teachers, including dismissals, and provided for only a complementary supervisory role of the local municipalities. After the working group submitted the agreement to public consultation, all but three municipalities signed on to it and were involved with its implementation. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Protestants were the only other religious community allowed to offer religious education in primary schools. Members of other religious groups were not required to attend these classes. Groups other than the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestants were free to regulate their own religious education.

The Government collaborates with religious institutions by supporting interfaith dialogue and providing adult education courses in religion, as well as other subjects.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy continued to contribute 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government has established a working group for the better integration of members of the Muslim community into Liechtenstein society. The working group consists of representatives of the Muslim community and government officials who deal with Islam as part of their duties. The working group's objectives are to counter mutual prejudices and promote respect and tolerance on the basis of dialogue and mutual understanding. In cooperation with the national library, the working group has made accessible to the public a selection of books in Turkish as well as books on Islam.

The Government has supported or sponsored a variety of activities to promote the integration of immigrants and inter-cultural understanding, including a class on inter-cultural dialogue in the curriculum of the national administration's internal training program.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Roman Catholics, Protestants, and members of other faiths work well together on an ecumenical basis. Differences among religious faiths are not a significant source of tension in society. There have been no reports of verbal or physical acts against Jewish persons or property. The Jewish community in Liechtenstein is too small to sustain an organizational structure of its own.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy and the Foreign Office conduct annual discussions of religious freedom issues in preparation for this report.

LITHUANIA

The Constitution establishes the right to freedom of religion except where religious observance would violate the Constitution or national law, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion. Some religious groups enjoy government benefits not available to others. Nontraditional religious groups face some restrictions.

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

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, although members of religious minorities occasionally are subject to acts of intolerance. The media reported instances of anti-Semitic acts, statements, and events, including the founding of a nationalist political party with overt anti-Semitic policies. The political leadership of the country publicly criticized anti-Semitic statements when they occurred.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and tolerance and in discussions on the country's strategy for addressing its Holocaust legacy.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 25,174 square miles and its population is approximately 3.4 million. In May 2005, there were 675 Roman Catholic parishes. Some 140,000 adherents of the Eastern Orthodox Church constituted the country's second largest religious group, with 52 communities mainly along the border with Belarus. The Old Believers, numbering 27,000, have 60 registered religious communities. The estimated 20,000 Lutherans had 58 communities, primarily in the southwest. The two branches of the Evangelical Reformed community had approximately 7,000 members in 17 communities. The six Sunni Muslim communities counted approximately 2,700 members, while the Greek Catholic community had approximately 300 members. The Jewish community numbered approximately 4,000. The majority of local Jews are secular, and only about 1,200 belonged to one of the seven religious communities.

The Chabad Lubavich, a Hassidic Jewish group, operates a school (kindergarten through 12th grade), a social center, and a kosher kitchen in the capital of Vilnius.

The Karaites have been in the country since 1397. Karaites, while not unique to the country, exist in few other locations in the world. Karaites speak a Turkic-based language and use the Hebrew alphabet. Some consider Karaite to be a branch of Judaism; the religion is based exclusively on the Old Testament. The Government recognizes the Karaites as a distinct ethnic group. Two houses of worship, one in Vilnius and one in nearby Trakai, serve the Karaite religious community of approximately 250 members. Their only religious leader is also their community president.

Roman Catholicism, the dominant faith in Lithuania prior to Soviet era, survived the years of occupation and remains both dominant and influential. According to the 2001 census, approximately 79 percent of the inhabitants considered themselves to be Roman Catholics. An estimated 9.4 percent of the population did not identify with any religious denomination. According to 1998 research data, approximately one-third of the country's Roman Catholics attended church services at least once a month. Data on religious participation for members of other faiths were not available.

Approximately 0.23 percent of the population belonged to what the Government refers to as "nontraditional" religious communities. The most numerous are the Full Gospel Word of Faith Movement, Pentecostals/Charismatics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and the New Apostolic Church. According to the Ministry of Justice, a total of 1,046 traditional and 172 nontraditional religious associations, centers, and communities have officially registered with the State Register of Legal Entities.

Foreign missionary groups, including Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution provides that a person's freedom to profess and propagate his or her religion or faith "may be subject only to those limitations prescribed by law and only when such restrictions are necessary to protect the safety of society, public order, a person's health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others." It is unlawful to make use of the religious teachings of churches and other religious organizations, their religious activities, and their houses of prayer for purposes that contradict the Constitution or the law. The Government has never had occasion to implement this law. The Government may also temporarily restrict freedom of expression of religious conviction during a period of martial law or a state of emergency. There is no state religion; however, under the 1995 Law on Religious Communities and Associations, some religious groups enjoy government benefits not available to others, including government financing, the right to teach religion in public schools, and the right to register marriages.

The Constitution classifies religious communities into state-recognized traditional groups and others. In practice, however, a four-tiered system exists: traditional, state-recognized, registered, and unregistered communities.

The law grants property rights for prayer houses, homes, and other buildings to religious communities, associations, and centers, and permits construction of facilities necessary for their activities. A 2003 change in the law enables all registered religious groups to own property.

In the absence of any legal definitions, government authorities arbitrarily acknowledge as traditional only those religions that can trace their presence in the country back at least 300 years.

The law specifies nine traditional religious communities: Latin Rite Catholics, Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed Church, Orthodox Christians (Moscow Patriarchate), Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites.

Traditional religious communities and associations may register marriages, may establish subsidiary institutions, are eligible to receive government assistance, may establish joint private/public schools, and have the right to provide religious instruction in the public schools. Their highest religious leaders are eligible to apply for diplomatic passports, their clergy and theological students are exempt from military service, and they may have military chaplains. The Ministry of Justice does not require traditional religious communities and associations to register their bylaws. Traditional religious communities do not have to pay social and health insurance for clergy and other employees, and they are not subject to a value-added tax (VAT) on basic utilities, such as electricity, telephone, and heat.

The law stipulates that the Government may officially recognize nontraditional religious communities that have societal support and have been registered in the country for at least 25 years. Nontraditional religious communities must apply to the Ministry of Justice and provide a description of their religious teachings and their aims and a founding statement signed by no fewer than 15 members who are adult citizens of the country. The Ministry must review the documents within 6 months.

While only traditional religious communities receive annual state subsidies, non-traditional groups are eligible for government support for their cultural and social projects.

The Baptists are currently the only state-recognized religion. They do not receive annual subsidies, tax exemptions, or exemptions from military service enjoyed by traditional communities. In practice, state-recognized religions receive some additional privileges from the Government, but not to the extent that traditional religious groups do. They are entitled to perform marriages and do not have to pay social and health insurance for clergy and other employers.

Registered religious communities can act as legal entities and thus may rent or own land for religious buildings. They do not receive regular subsidies, tax exemptions, social benefits, or exemptions from military enjoyed by traditional communities.

Communities must register to obtain official status, a requisite for opening a bank account, owning property, or acting in a legal or official capacity as a community.

Unregistered communities have no legal status or state privileges. There were no reports that the Government prevented any such groups from worshiping or seeking members.

For the third consecutive year, Parliament deferred granting "state-recognized religion" status to the United Methodist Church of Lithuania, although the Government stated that no one had contested the Methodists' petition for status change. The Pentecostals applied for state-recognized status in late 2004, and their application was pending Parliament consideration. The Ministry of Justice was evaluating the Seventh-day Adventists' application to change their status to state-recognized. At the end of the period covered by the report, no decision had been reached.

No separate government agency addresses the concerns of religious groups. A small department in the Ministry of Justice adjudicates requests of religious groups for registration. The Prime Minister's advisor for Cultural and Jewish Affairs follows relevant issues within the Jewish community.

In 2000, the Government and the Holy See agreed to establish a military Ordinariat to provide religious support to Roman Catholic members of the military service by means of military chaplains. In 2002, the Ministry of Defense and the Catholic Church signed a regulation on military chaplains' activities. There were 16 chaplains as of May 2005. The Ministry of Defense provides material support for the Ordinariat and its places of worship. Other traditional churches and religious groups also provide religious support to the military services.

Conscientious objectors may petition for alternative military service within military structures, but there is no option for alternative nonmilitary service, despite requests by members of Jehovah's Witnesses. Persons enrolled in alternative military service must follow military regulations and reside on military installations. They receive assignments to work in nonviolent military roles, such as grounds maintenance, or can work as unskilled laborers in government health or social care institutions.

In August 2000, three agreements between the Government and the Holy See took effect: "On Cooperation in the Sphere of Education and Culture," "On Spiritual Guidance of Catholics Serving in the Military," and "On Legal Aspects of Relations Between the Catholic Church and the Government." The last of these agreements specified that the Government would fully fund private Roman Catholic schools. The number of wholly private religious schools in Lithuania is relatively low per capita. More often, the Government and religious groups establish private-public schools in partnership. In 2001, to avoid discrimination, the Government agreed to fund all private religious schools through a voucher system. Five private Catholic schools in the capital city protested that the municipality's voucher payments were insufficient to meet the cost of necessary capital repairs. The Government, invoking the 2000 agreements as a justification, agreed in August 2004 to provide annual supplemental funding for the five schools, and allocated \$185,000 (500,000 litas) for the first year. The Government did not offer supplemental funds to other private Catholic and non-Catholic schools.

The last of these agreements established Assumption Day (August 15) as a national holiday, in addition to the previously established holidays of St. Mary's celebration (January 1), Easter Monday, All Saints' Day (November 1), Christmas, and

Boxing Day (December 26). The list of holidays can change by agreement of both sides. There were no reports of formal complaints that these agreements adversely affect religious freedom for the adherents of other religions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Parliament in 2004 returned to the Government for revision a proposal to amend the Law on Religious Communities and Associations, which the Catholic Church had initiated in 2002. The amendments would have codified into law the de facto tiered system of classifying religious groups, enshrining discriminatory treatment of different religious communities.

The Ministry of Justice's Religious Affairs Department remains responsible for processing initial registration applications, but in January 2004 the new State Register of Legal Entities, under the national Registry Center, assumed management of the database of registered religious communities. Religious communities, formerly able to register only in the capital, can now file applications at local registration centers throughout the country. Registration centers forward new applications to the Religious Affairs Department and process renewal registrations locally. New communities affiliated with traditional religions register for free, while nontraditional communities pay a registration fee of \$32 (105 litas).

Since 1995, the Ministry of Justice has turned down two applications, those of the Osho Ojas Meditation Center and the Lithuanian Pagans Community (Old Sorcerers). In February 2005, the Government issued a registration permit to the Osho Ojas Meditation Center following the center's successful appeal of the Ministry's two previous denials.

In 2002, following objections of the Catholic Church, Parliament suspended the status as a traditional community of a pagan group, the Old Baltic Faith Community Romuva.

The Government does not restrict operations of foreign missionary groups within the country but continues to accord preferential treatment to the nine traditional religions.

The Constitution establishes that public educational institutions are secular. However, in February 2003, the Vice Minister of Education admitted in a public interview that, by agreement with the Holy See, Catholic priests have the final say in hiring teachers of religion in public schools. The law permits religious instruction only of traditional and state-recognized faiths in public schools. In practice, parents can choose either religious instruction or secular ethics classes for their children.

The law requires the Government to finance religion classes (of traditional faiths only) in public schools. Since 2001, amendments to the Law on Religious Communities and Associations have required the Government to fund religious schools of traditional religious communities. The Government's Department of European Law criticized the amendments for allowing discriminatory treatment of nontraditional religious communities and associations. The Department argued that the Government's right to assign different legal statuses to religious communities did not authorize it to provide different rights and privileges. The Government subsequently amended the law, creating a system of vouchers that families could use to send their children to schools of traditional or nontraditional religious communities.

Following the restoration of the country's independence, the Government began the process of returning to religious communities' property that Nazi and Soviet occupations had destroyed and confiscated. The law grants all religious communities equal opportunity to reacquire control of property they once used for religious services. The Roman Catholic community has been more successful in regaining its property than many other religious communities. The Government returned some religious properties, including 28 synagogues, to the Jewish community, mostly between 1993 and 1996. The Government successfully resolved a number of claims for restitution; others were still pending. Lack of funds for compensation is the primary impediment to the return of private property. The Government has taken no action to reconstitute property of religious institutions that no longer exist, and it has no plans to do so.

In early 2002, the Government established a commission on communal property restitution. The commission's task was to identify communal property eligible for restitution and to propose amendments to the law, enabling the secular Jewish community to benefit from the restitution process. In 2003, the Lithuanian Jewish Community and the World Jewish Property Restitution Organization submitted to the Government a list of former Jewish communal properties they claimed for restitution. The Government allocated \$38,000 (110,000 litas) for archival research to verify the lists. In 2004 and again in February 2005, the Jewish Community of Lithuania submitted expanded lists of claims to properties throughout the country. The Government expected to complete verification of the claims by September 2005, at

which point they would submit to the Parliament amendments to the property restitution law to allow the restitution process to move forward.

An interministerial commission coordinates investigations of religious, esoteric, and spiritual groups. It seeks to ensure that activities of religious groups are in line with the principles of a democratic society, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. The Minister of Justice appoints the chairperson of the commission, which also comprises representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Education, Health, and Foreign Affairs, the General Prosecutor's office, and the State Security Department. The Government established the commission following some parliamentarians' calls for increased control of "sects." In 2003, the commission investigated the conditions under which religious, esoteric, and spiritual groups may spread their faith via educational institutions. In particular, the commission looked at how many groups were renting premises from public educational institutions. The commission also investigated the alleged involvement of Satanists in the desecration of cemeteries. In 2004, the Commission began an investigation of both "magic and the occult on television" and offers of "magical services" by, for example, psychics and astrologers. In May 2005, the local Council of Bishops also raised their concern about "shamanism," objecting also to the municipal government's funding of public "tai chi" classes in the capital.

In June 2003, a Member of Parliament resubmitted draft legislation "On Barring the Activities of Sects" that he had previously introduced in 2001. Parliament's Legal Department criticized the draft and Parliament did not consider this legislation.

In March 2004, Parliament established a Working Group on Issues of Spiritual and Religious Groups in response to complaints from persons whose relatives religious "sects" had allegedly harmed. The group reviewed legislation regulating activities of religious groups and aired plans to introduce tougher registration requirements. Following parliamentary debates on "destructive sects and cults," terms which encompass both recognized and unrecognized religious groups, Parliament gave initial approval in June 2004 to amend the Criminal Code and Administrative Code. The changes to the Criminal Code introduced fines and imprisonment of up to 3 years for religious groups, communities, and centers that use psychological violence to persuade a person or his/her relative to take illegal action or prevent him/her from pursuing legal action. Parliament rejected amendments to the Administrative Code that would have set fines for individuals seeking to pursue religious goals in violation of society's security and public order or in violation of the health, morals, and rights of individuals.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reports of abuses targeting specific religions by terrorist organizations.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In September 2004, the President awarded the Life Saving Cross to 55 persons who worked to save Jews during the Holocaust. He commended their selflessness and recognized the substantial number of people who perished during the Holocaust.

The Government continued its efforts to support post-World War II restitution efforts. In February 2005, the Government reiterated its commitment to Jewish property restitution during meetings with the Jewish Community. In 2003, the Government returned 46 Torah scrolls to an Israeli spiritual and heritage group for distribution among Jewish congregations worldwide. The Government has not returned the few remaining Torahs at the National Museum. In November 2004, the Vilnius city government participated in erecting a monument at the site of the former Jewish cemetery.

Following a Klaipeda district court ruling overturning fines and 1-year jail-sentences for two members of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Government organized a working group to explore the possibility of introducing alternative service in nonmilitary structures for conscientious objectors. The working group found that 23 of the 25 recent conscientious objectors accepted service in noncombatant military positions. Rather than create a separate program of alternative nonmilitary service for the few conscientious objectors, the Government decided to waive their military service obligation.

Since early 2004, the Ministry of Justice had delayed registration of a Unification Church community in response to parental protests and the objections of a self-proclaimed “anti-cult” group. After reviewing the evidence against the Church, the Ministry determined that the protesters’ claims of abuse on the part of the Unification Church in Lithuania were baseless and issued the registration permit in January 2005.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relations among various religious communities in society contributed to religious freedom, although members of religious minorities occasionally are targets of acts of intolerance, such as insults.

Disputing factions within some religious communities, for example within evangelical, Old Believer, and Jewish communities, periodically appealed to official authorities and courts to limit the activities of their rivals, sometimes by opposing a certain faction’s registration as a religious community. The Government attempted not to involve itself in internal disputes of religious communities. In April and June 2003, however, Vilnius administrative courts ruled to create separate new Old Believer communities in response to a conflict within the Old Believer community. In May 2004, the Jewish community temporarily closed the Vilnius synagogue following a disorderly dispute in the synagogue between members of the Orthodox and the Chabad Lubavich Jewish groups. The community closed the synagogue again in August 2004, following another disturbance. The Government charged the leader of the Chabad Lubavich community with assault and trespassing in the second occurrence, but subsequently dropped the charges. The synagogue remained closed pending resolution of the community’s internal disputes.

Activities of some nontraditional religions raised concerns within segments of society. Since 2003, for example, some parents had opposed their children’s membership in the Unification Church and protested the registration of a second Unification Church community. (The first community registered in 1993.) The Ministry approved the registration in January 2005.

An estimated 10 percent of the pre-World War II population of Lithuania was Jewish. More than 200,000 Jewish persons (approximately 95 percent of the Jewish population of the period) died as victims of the Holocaust. The country is still reconciling itself with its past and working to understand it better. In 1998, President Valdas Adamkus established a historical commission to investigate crimes of both the Holocaust and the subsequent Soviet occupation. The commission has held annual conferences and several seminars, published several reports, and co-sponsored a Holocaust education program.

In the past year, there has been an increase in anti-Semitic remarks by extremist, and a few more mainstream, politicians. The country’s Jewish communities are active and publicly express their concerns when anti-Semitic remarks occur. The political leadership of the country and most media outlets generally criticize anti-Semitic statements when they occur.

Parliament commemorated Holocaust Day by publicly acknowledging and apologizing for the killing of Jews and destruction of Jewish culture in the country during World War II. The chairman of the Jewish Community attributed recent public expressions of anti-Semitism to ignorance and the failure of society to recognize the extent of the destruction that occurred there. The Prime Minister attended the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Holocaust Day in Auschwitz.

Anonymous anti-Semitic comments repeatedly surfaced on the Internet, most notably after the public release of the U.S. State Department’s Human Rights Report, which enumerated the anti-Semitic incidents that occurred in the country during the previous year. Anti-Semites responded to the Jewish community’s submission of lists of properties for restitution by posting anti-Semitic invective on the internet.

Fringe and anti-Semitic groups gained attention through public anti-Semitic statements. In April 2005, a Siauliai city council member founded a nationalist political party with anti-Semitic policies. A plank of the party’s platform is to stop the Jewish communal property restitution process. In June 2005, several politicians and government officials immediately and publicly denounced the politician’s statements, and the State Security Department, after an investigation, recommended bringing charges.

In February 2004, the popular national daily “Respublika” carried a series of editorials with obvious anti-Semitic overtones, under the title “Who Rules the World?” The final editorial in the series claimed that the Jews wield power globally. Government officials at the highest levels condemned the publication of the series and the anti-Semitic sentiments therein, but the Jewish community and others criticized the Government for responding too slowly. Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)

and representatives of other religious groups similarly denounced the anti-Semitic articles. The Prosecutor General's Office and the State Security Department launched pretrial investigations over incitement of ethnic and racial hatred by "Respublika's" editor-in-chief. In April 2004, Parliament formed a working group to strengthen legislation prohibiting incitement of discord, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. In January 2005, the Journalism Department fined "Respublika" \$2,200 (6,000 litas) for ethical lapses. In February 2005, the Prosecutor General's Office dropped the investigation, but then quickly resumed it at the urging of the President and senior Government officials. In May 2005, a Vilnius administrative court fined the editor-in-chief of the Russian-language version of "Respublika" \$370 (1,000 litas) for dissemination of a publication that instigates national, racial or religious discord. The court had not rendered a decision on charges against several other parties, including "Respublika's" owner and principal editor.

In May 2005, four to six motorcyclists wearing Nazi-style uniforms and driving Nazi-era motorcycles drove past the Lithuanian Jewish Community headquarters in Vilnius. Members of the community were outside and heard the riders yell Nazi epithets as they drove by. This incident occurred the same day as the opening of the motorcycle season in Lithuania, with over 700 bikers gathering in a nearby park. The mayor immediately asked the police to look into the incident. Police have identified several suspects but have not apprehended anyone. In April 2004, the police launched an investigation into the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the Kaisiadorys region, and they had not found any of the perpetrators at the end of the period covered by this report. The case remained open.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintained a close and regular dialogue on religious issues with senior officials in the Government, Members of Parliament, and presidential advisors, as well as continual contact with religious leaders. Religious groups used the Embassy as a vehicle to voice their complaints, and the Embassy encouraged religious leaders to share their views on the status of religious freedom and to raise complaints. The Embassy was active in discussing the restitution of Jewish communal property and the restoration of historic religious property with government officials and community leaders in the country. The Embassy also maintained regular contact with U.S. missionary groups.

The Ambassador publicly criticized anti-Semitic statements in the media and encouraged a similar response from the highest officials of the Government. The Embassy also maintained close relations with the Jewish community to monitor the situation.

The Embassy continually engaged government officials at all levels on issues relating to religious freedom. In March 2004, in response to anti-Semitic articles published in the daily newspaper "Respublika," the Ambassador raised his concerns with the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy also released several public statements, and the Ambassador gave interviews condemning the articles. Following such criticism from U.S. and European Union diplomatic representatives, high-level government officials stepped up their condemnation of the articles and of anti-Semitism in general. The Foreign Minister and Prime Minister mentioned their concern for the country's international image in their censure of the articles and in calls for a criminal investigation of "Respublika's" editor-in-chief.

The Embassy funded a number of projects with the goal of promoting greater religious tolerance, particularly projects related to building broader understanding of the Holocaust. The Ambassador regularly spoke on tolerance issues and hosted a roundtable focusing on tolerance and Holocaust issues at the American Center in May 2005, attended by high school students and members of the community. The Ambassador also hosted an Iftar to celebrate Ramadan with 20 members of the Muslim community in November 2004. In the summer of 2004, two secondary school teachers participated in a teacher-training initiative in the U.S. that sought to promote and develop Holocaust education.

In April 2005, the Embassy released a public statement condemning anti-Semitism after a politician announced the creation of a nationalist, anti-Semitic political party.

LUXEMBOURG

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 999 square miles, and its population is approximately 450,000. The country is historically Roman Catholic, and Catholicism remains the predominant faith. According to a 1979 law, the Government may not collect or maintain statistics on religious affiliation; but over 90 percent of the population is estimated to be baptized Catholic. The Lutheran and Calvinist Churches are the largest Protestant denominations. Muslims are estimated to number approximately 6,000 persons, including approximately 885 refugees from Montenegro; Orthodox (Greek, Serbian, Russian, and Romanian) adherents are estimated to number 5,000 persons; and there are approximately 1,000 Jews. The Baha'i Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Universal Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses are represented in smaller numbers. The number of professed atheists reportedly is growing.

There are no significant foreign missionary groups. Many religious groups described as "sects" are represented in the country. They are expected to obey the law, but their activities have not become significant political or social issues.

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. The Government does not register religious groups. However, based on the Concordat of 1801, some churches receive financial support from the state. The Constitution specifically provides for state payment of the salaries and pensions of clergy of those religions who have signed conventions with the Government. Pursuant to negotiated agreements with the Government, the following religious groups receive such support: Roman Catholic, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Jewish, and some other Protestant denominations. In 2003, the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox and Anglican Churches also concluded conventions with the Government.

An application for financial support for the Muslim community has been under consideration for over seven years. In late 2003, the Muslim community named a national representative and single interlocutor, which allowed discussions over the convention to proceed. Once signed, the convention will allow the Muslim community to receive government funding. There was no agreement by the end of the period covered by this report.

The following religious holy days are considered national holidays: Shrove Monday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, Christmas, and the second day of Christmas.

There is a long tradition of religious education in public schools. A 1997 convention between the Minister of National Education and the Roman Catholic Archbishop governs religious instruction. In accordance with this convention, religious instruction is a local matter, coordinated at the communal level between representatives of the Catholic Church and communal authorities. Government-paid lay teachers provide instruction (totaling two school hours per week) at the primary school level. Parents and pupils may choose between instruction in Roman Catholicism or an ethics course; requests for exemption from religious instruction are addressed on an individual basis. Although approximately 85 percent of primary school students choose religious instruction, the number drops to 65 percent for high school students.

The State subsidizes private religious schools. All private, religious, and non-sectarian schools are eligible for and receive government subsidies, if the religious

group has concluded a convention with the State. The State also subsidizes a Catholic seminary.

The government launched a pilot program in one high school that provides non-denominational values education, highlighting the principal world religions and schools of thought. This program was developed in consultation with the Catholic Church and Muslim community, among others, and, after five years, it is intended to be made universal in the country's school system.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim faiths work well together on an interfaith basis. Differences among religious faiths are not a significant source of tension in society. There were no reports of verbal or physical violence against Jewish persons or property during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its policy to promote human rights. The Embassy's Human Rights Officer has met with representatives of several government ministries at a working level to discuss issues related to religious freedoms. The ministries were cooperative interlocutors, who spoke openly about the relationship between religious groups and the Government. The Human Rights Officer also met with representatives from religious groups and nongovernmental organizations, none of whom voiced any concern over the state of religious freedom in the country.

MACEDONIA

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

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The continued absence of provocative actions by state and nonstate actors, and ongoing government efforts to consolidate a unitary, multiethnic state, helped foster a climate of general respect for religious freedom. However, the law places some limits on religious practice by restricting the registration of religious groups and locations where religious rites may be performed. During the period covered by this report, these restrictions were applied to a small group aligned with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which denies the ecclesiastical independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

The generally amicable relationship among the various religious communities contributed to religious freedom. However, the dispute between the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox churches intensified in May 2005, when the Serbian Orthodox Church rejected the legitimacy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and instead recognized a small splinter group as the "only canonical" church in Macedonia. The Government, with general support from the majority of the Macedonian public, openly sided with the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the long-running dispute.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 9,781 square miles and its population is a little more than 2 million. The country has two major religions: Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Nominally, 66 percent of the population is Macedonian Orthodox, 30 percent is Muslim, 1 percent is Roman Catholic, and 3 percent is of other faiths (largely various Protestant denominations). There is also a small Jewish community in Skopje. Public participation in religious activities tends to center on major holidays or weddings and funerals.

Numerous foreign missionaries are active and represent a wide range of faiths. Many of these missionaries enter the country in connection with other work, often charitable or medical. Several Protestant missionary groups and members of Jehovah's Witnesses are active.

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 places some limits on religious practices, including the establishment of places of worship, the collection of contributions, and locations where religious rites may be held.

The constitutional provision for religious freedom is further defined by the 1997 Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups. This law designates the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and the Methodist Church as religious communities. All other registered associations are considered to be religious groups. In 1998 and 1999, the Constitutional Court struck down several provisions of the 1997 law, including the requirement that religious groups must be registered to perform religious ceremonies. In practice, the remaining provisions are not enforced consistently.

The law requires that religious groups be registered to perform a number of activities. For instance, only registered religious groups may obtain permits to build churches or request visas for foreigners coming to the country to undertake religious work. The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups contained a number of specific requirements for the registration of such groups, but these requirements were struck down by the Constitutional Court in 1999. Consequently, there was considerable confusion over which procedures still applied. The law prohibits the registration of more than one group for each religious confession.

Regulations require that foreigners entering the country with the intent to carry out religious work or perform religious rites obtain approval from the State Commission on Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups to receive a visa. When applying for visas, such persons must submit a letter of invitation from representatives of a registered religious group in the country to the Commission, which then issues a letter of approval to be submitted with the visa request. Approvals were typically issued in less than a week. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports that any applications for religious visas were denied to qualified candidates of registered religious communities or groups.

However, a Polish-born nun associated with the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid claimed that, in September 2004, the Ministry of Interior declined to extend her residency permit because of her affiliation with that group. Since the law prevents registration of more than one group for each confession, the Ohrid Archbishopric has been denied registration and is thus not legally entitled to sponsor foreign religious workers.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups places some restrictions on the locations where religious ceremonies may be held. It provides that religious rites and religious activities "shall take place at churches, mosques, and other temples, and in gardens that are parts of those facilities, at cemeteries, and at other facilities of the religious group." Provision is made for holding services in other places, provided that a permit is obtained at least 15 days in advance. No permit or permission is required to perform religious rites in a private home. The law also states that religious activities "shall not violate the public peace and order, and shall not disrespect the religious feelings and other freedoms and rights" of other citizens.

Education laws restrict the establishment of all private primary schools, including parochial schools. However, there are no restrictions placed on religious education that takes place in religious spaces such as churches and mosques. Children below the age of 10 years may not receive religious instruction without the permission of their parents or guardians.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups also places some limitations on the collection of contributions by restricting it to places where religious rites and activities are conducted. In practice, these provisions of the law are not enforced.

In May 2005, after a lengthy delay, the Ministry of Justice released a new draft law on religious communities and groups. The draft law proposed a transfer of the responsibility for registering religious groups to the judiciary from the State Commission on Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups. Parliament had taken no action on the legislation by the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, restrictions contained in the Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups continued to be applied to a group known as the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid. Led by defrocked Macedonian Orthodox Church Bishop Jovan Zoran Vraniskovski, this schismatic group is recognized as an Archbishopric by the Serbian Orthodox Church and denies the Macedonian Orthodox Church's self-declared autocephaly (ecclesiastical independence, which is not recognized by other Orthodox churches).

In November 2004, the State Commission on Relations with the Religious Communities denied the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid's application to be registered as a religious group. It cited a number of grounds for the denial, noting that under the law only one group may be registered for each confession, and arguing that the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid's name was not sufficiently distinct from that of the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Similar arguments were used to reject the registration applications of two small Christian groups using the names "Church of Christ" and "Christian Meeting House" during the period covered by this report. The Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid's appeal to the Supreme Court, which followed two unsuccessful administrative appeals, was still under consideration in June 2005.

Representatives of the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid alleged that, on May 1 2005, an Easter service held in a private residence was interrupted by police, who entered without a warrant and asked to see believers' national identification cards. This report could not be independently confirmed. They also alleged that, in January, at least two of their followers were summoned to the police station in Prilep and were interrogated about their support for the group. Complaints regarding the Prilep incident were lodged with the Ministry of Interior's Professional Standards Unit, which was investigating the matter. The group also claimed that 30 families that supported the group's registration application were visited and questioned by Macedonian Orthodox Church priests and policemen.

In July 2004, Zoran Vraniskovski, now recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church as Archbishop of Ohrid, was convicted in a Bitola court on criminal charges and sentenced to 18 months in prison in August. On June 24, 2005, the Bitola Court of Appeals upheld the conviction and sentence. The charges alleged that his religious services, as well as his supposed publication and distribution of a religious calendar containing text considered offensive by members of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, violated the law by "inciting religious and ethnic hatred." The text of the calendar calls the Macedonian Orthodox Church "the last fortress of communism" and describes its believers as "heretics." He admitted to writing the text but not to producing and distributing the calendar. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) monitored the trial, but issued no public comment on the verdict. He was also accused of embezzling Macedonian Orthodox Church funds.

Vraniskovski's residence was vandalized in February 2004, and unknown intruders forcibly cut the hair of several nuns present. He claimed the attackers were state agents, but some speculated that his followers staged the attack to generate international sympathy.

He was also arrested and detained for 5 days in 2003 on charges of trespassing and disturbing the peace. He had attempted to baptize his niece at a Macedonian Orthodox church; authorities claimed his attempt to do so constituted trespassing since he had earlier been defrocked by the Macedonian Orthodox Church and therefore was not authorized to perform religious rites in that church.

The 1997 Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups specifically allows foreign citizens to carry out religious activities, but only at the request of a registered religious body. During the period covered by this report, several individuals associated with such groups were able to obtain religious worker or other worker visas. In addition, officials delayed Serbian Orthodox Church Bishop Irinej in October 2004 as he tried to transit through the country to a meeting in Greece.

Churches and mosques often are built without the appropriate building permits; however, the Government normally does not take action against religious buildings that lack them. In the past, several Protestant groups have been unable to obtain building permits for new church facilities because of bureaucratic complications that affect all new construction. In October 2004, policemen demolished a small monastery that was being built by members of the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid in Nizepole, near Bitola. The organization's lawyer conceded that the monastery was being constructed without a permit but noted that other buildings in the area, also built without permits, were not destroyed. At the end of the period covered by this report, the OSCE was unable to obtain a copy of the decision by the competent ministry authorizing the monastery's destruction.

The issue of restitution of religious properties expropriated by the former Yugoslav Government had not been fully resolved. Many churches and mosques had extensive grounds or other properties that were expropriated by the communist regime. Some progress was made in restitution of previously state-owned religious property. Virtually all churches and mosques have been returned to the ownership of the appropriate religious community, but that was not the case for many of the other properties. Often restitution or compensation claims are complicated by the fact that the seized properties have changed hands many times or have been developed. In view of the country's very limited financial resources, it was unlikely that religious communities would gain restitution of many of the expropriated properties.

The Jewish community continued to press for the full restitution of property confiscated by the former Yugoslav Government. In November 2004, representatives of the Jewish community met with Embassy representatives to discuss these concerns. The community received a partial decision restoring some of the disputed properties later the same month, and they plan to begin building a Holocaust Memorial Center on the site in September 2005. However, additional properties originally belonging to the community had not been returned by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Bektashi, a Sufi Islamic group, have sued the Government for not reversing the former Yugoslavia's nationalization of the Bektashis' Tetovo compound, the Arabati Baba Tekke. The Bektashi also have filed suit against the Macedonian Islamic Community, armed members of which seized part of the complex in 2002 and continue to occupy the mosque. These disputes were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, and prominent religious leaders frequently spoke out in support of pluralism and religious tolerance. However, the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid's and the Serbian Orthodox Church's public rejection of and activism against the Macedonian Orthodox Church's independence provoked angry responses by the public, press, and the Government. The May 26, 2005, decision by the Serbian Orthodox Church to recognize the Serbian-aligned Ohrid Archbishopric as the "only canonical" Orthodox church in Macedonia caused outrage among the public, who viewed the decision as an attack on the country's national identity. The Government often sided with the Macedonian Church by applying the law against the Ohrid Archbishopric.

Religious differences in the country often correspond with ethnic identity. Specifically, most Muslims are ethnic Albanians. However, there are a number of ethnic Macedonians who are Muslim. Some ethnic Macedonian Muslims contended that the State sometimes confused them with ethnic Albanians and ethnic Turks because of Muslim surnames and mixed marriages and, in some instances, assigned their children to Albanian language classes. However, societal discrimination is more likely to be based upon ethnic bias than upon religious prejudice.

There was one unverified report of a local journalist being verbally harassed by Macedonian Orthodox Church officials after interviewing Zoran Vraniskovski, whom the Serbian Orthodox Church recognizes as the Archbishop of Ohrid. The journalist stated to an Embassy representative that on June 27, 2005, a number of church offi-

cials insisted that he not air the interview, in which the leader of the Orthodox Archbishopric sharply criticized Macedonian church clergymen as “traitors.” The report’s broadcast was delayed by a day.

During the period covered by this report, there were isolated reports of vandalism of religious properties. Most such acts were directed against Orthodox cemeteries, where burial monuments were damaged or broken. In addition, the Bektashi compound in Tetovo, known as the Arabati Baba Tekke, was vandalized in July 2004. In that incident, a 20 year-old was charged with “defiling a grave” and “damaging monuments of cultural-historical significance.”

Jewish leaders reported that there were no physical or verbal attacks against Jewish persons or property during the period covered by this report.

The Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid also claimed that one of the group’s private chapels was vandalized four times since January, most recently on June 9, 2005. They alleged that religious artifacts were broken and that, in response to the vandalism, the police discouraged them from holding religious services there.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and Embassy staff met with leaders and representatives of the various religious communities, as well as with government officials, to address religious freedom issues and support the Government’s policy of ethnic and religious tolerance.

The Ambassador and other Embassy representatives continued to follow the developments in the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid case, in close coordination with OSCE. The Ambassador and other Embassy officials have discussed the issue with the President, Prime Minister, and Church officials. On each occasion, the Embassy has urged respect for religious freedom and the rule of law, as well as moderation in language on both sides.

U.S. officials met with members of the Jewish community in December 2004 to discuss their concerns regarding the stalled restitution of properties granted to the Jewish Holocaust Fund in Macedonia, and then highlighted these concerns in subsequent meetings with government officials. By January 2005, sufficient property had been transferred to the fund to enable construction of a Holocaust Memorial Center in the former Jewish quarter of Skopje to begin.

Embassy officials also took part in events designed to foster religious tolerance, including a religious tolerance seminar conducted by an American Jewish scholar at a Muslim academy near Skopje and a lecture by a prominent Muslim scholar. The Ambassador also hosted an Iftar for celebrating Ramadan to promote understanding and cooperation with the Islamic community.

MALTA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago, consisting of three occupied islands in the Mediterranean Sea, and has an area of 122 square miles. Its population is approximately 400,000. The overwhelming majority of citizens (approximately 95 percent) are Roman Catholic, and approximately 63 percent attend services regularly. Most of the country’s political leaders are practicing Roman Catholics. The country joined the European Union in 2004, and the Maltese government supported the failed effort to include a reference to “Europe’s Christian heritage” in the European Constitution.

Most congregants at the local Protestant churches are not Maltese but rather some of the many British retirees who live in the country and vacationers from many other nations. Of the Protestant churches in the country, the Church of England has a congregation of about 350 members; the united congregations of the Presbyterian and Methodist Church number 120 and the Evangelical Church of Germany has approximately 145 members. There is also a union of 16 groups of Evangelical churches with approximately 500 members in all, which include the Pentecostal and other non-denominational churches. There are approximately 680 Jehovah's Witnesses, 108 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and 30 members of the Bible Baptist Church. There is a Jewish congregation with approximately 120 members. Zen Buddhism has approximately 10 members and the Baha'i Faith also has approximately 30 members. There is one Muslim mosque and a Muslim primary school. Of the estimated 3,000 Muslims in the country, approximately 2,250 are foreigners, 600 are naturalized citizens, and 150 are native-born citizens.

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 establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion and declares that the authorities of the Catholic Church have "the authority to teach which principles are right and which are wrong." Divorce is not available in the country. However, the state generally recognizes divorces from individuals domiciled abroad who have undergone divorce proceedings in a competent court. The Government and the Catholic Church participate in a foundation which finances Catholic schools, where tuition is free. The foundation was established in 1991 as a result of the transfer from the Church to the State of properties not set aside for pastoral use under the 1991 Ecclesiastical Entities Act. The Government subsidizes children living in church-sponsored residential homes. There is one Muslim private school; work on a projected 500-grave Muslim cemetery did not begin during the period covered by this report.

There are six religious holy days that are considered to be national holidays: The Motherhood of Our Lady, St. Paul's Shipwreck, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, the Assumption, and Christmas Day. These holidays do not affect any religious groups negatively.

Since 1991, all churches have had similar legal rights. Religious organizations can own property such as buildings, and their ministers can perform marriages and other functions. While religious instruction in Catholicism is compulsory in all state schools, the Constitution establishes the right not to receive this instruction if the student (or guardian, in the case of a minor) objects, and this right is respected in practice.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The Roman Catholic Church makes its presence and its influence felt in everyday life. However, non-Catholics, including converts from Catholicism, do not face legal or societal discrimination, and relations between the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations generally are characterized by respect and cooperation. Proselytism by practitioners of non-Catholic faiths is conducted freely and openly. To promote tolerance, school curricula include studies in human rights, ethnic rela-

tions, and cultural diversity as a part of values education for students. There were no reported cases of anti-Semitic incidents during the year.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy advocates continued observance of basic human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Both the Embassy's private discussions with government officials and its informational programs for the public consistently emphasize these points.

Through a variety of public affairs programs, the Embassy continued to work with different sectors of society, including religious groups, to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance. Among the Embassy's initiatives during the period covered by this report was to host an Iftar to celebrate Ramadan for resident Muslim diplomats and community leaders, and increased outreach to the local chapter of the World Islamic Call Society, as well as a luncheon at the time of Passover for members of the Jewish community in the country.

MOLDOVA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the law includes restrictions that at times inhibit the activities of some religious groups.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to uphold its earlier decisions to deny some groups registration. A number of minority religious groups in the separatist region of Transnistria that is not controlled by the Government continued to be denied registration and were subjected to official harassment.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, disputes among various branches of the Christian Orthodox faith continued, and there were some reports of Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses experiencing harassment from local town councils, and Orthodox priests and adherents.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy specifically raised concerns about some religious groups' persistent registration difficulties to the highest levels of the Government.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 13,000 square miles, and its population, according to preliminary figures from the 2004 census, is approximately 3.9 million, including Transnistria. The Migration Department estimates that between 500,000 and 1 million citizens have left the country to work abroad since independence in 1992. The most common destination countries include Russia, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Greece, and more recently Great Britain and Ireland.

The predominant religion is Christian Orthodox. More than 90 percent of the population nominally belongs to one of two Orthodox denominations. According to the State Service for Religions (SSR), the Moldovan Orthodox Church (MOC) has 1,224 parishes, and the Bessarabian Orthodox Church (BOC) has 199 parishes. The BOC was formed in 1992 when a number of priests broke away from the MOC, and was only officially recognized in 2002, after years of being denied recognition. In addition, followers of the Old Rite Russian Orthodox Church (Old Believers) make up approximately 3.6 percent of the population. The religious traditions of the Orthodox Churches are entwined with the culture and patrimony of the country. Many self-professed atheists routinely celebrate religious holidays, cross themselves, light candles and kiss icons if local tradition and the occasion demand.

Adherents of other faiths include Roman Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, Jews, followers of Reverend Moon, Molokans (a Russian group), Messianic Jews (who believe that Jesus was the Messiah), Lutherans, Presbyterians, Hare Krishnas, and some other charismatic Christian and evangelical Christian groups. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has two congregations, with a total of approximately 250 members. According to the most recent statistics from the Israeli Cultural Center in Chisinau, the Jewish community has approximately 25,000 members, includ-

ing approximately 15,000 in Chisinau; 2,500 in Balti and surrounding areas; 1,600 in Tiraspol; 1,000 in Benderi; and 4,000 in small towns.

Foreign missionaries represent many faiths and denominations.

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 1992 Law on Religions, which codifies religious freedom, contains restrictions that inhibit the activities of unregistered religious groups. Although the law was amended in 2002, many of the restrictions remain in place. The law provides for freedom of religious practice, including each person's right to profess his or her religion in any form. It also protects the confidentiality of the confessional, allows denominations to establish associations and foundations, and states that the Government may not interfere in the religious activities of denominations. The law specifies that "in order to organize and function," religious organizations must be registered with the Government, and unregistered groups may not own property, engage employees, or obtain space in public cemeteries in their own names.

There is no state religion; however, the MOC receives favored treatment from the Government. The Metropolitan of Chisinau and all Moldova has a diplomatic passport. Other high-ranking MOC officials also reportedly have diplomatic passports issued by the Government.

The procedures for registering a religious organization are the same for all groups. In 2002, Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Religions. In order to register, a religious organization must present a declaration of creation, by-laws, and an explanation of its basic religious beliefs to the SSR. The SSR enters the religious organization into the Register of Religions within 30 working days. Under the new procedures, at the request of the SSR, a court can annul the recognition of the religious organization if the organization "carries out activities that harm the independence, sovereignty, integrity, and security of the Republic of Moldova, the public order, or are connected with political activities." The amendments also prohibit religious organizations from including in their by-laws any provisions that would violate the Constitution or any other laws.

The Government has recognized and registered 21 religious organizations, many of which are umbrella organizations with sub-entities throughout the country. Although the 2002 amendments to the Law on Religions were intended to simplify the registration process and make the process essentially automatic, the SSR continues to deny the registration of the Mormons, the Spiritual Organization of Muslims, the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Moldova and the True Orthodox Church of Moldova. The Mormons have tried repeatedly to register with the SSR since 2000. Their most recent application, which was submitted on January 28, 2004, remains under review according to the State Service.

In 1999, an amendment to the Law on Religions legalized proselytizing; however, the law explicitly forbids "abusive proselytizing," which is defined as an attempt to influence an individual's religious faith through violence or abuse of authority. During the period covered by this report, the authorities did not take any legal action against any individual for proselytizing.

A new draft of the Law on Religions, introduced in 2002, has since been revised to remove numerous restrictive measures. At the end of the period covered by this report, the draft law was being reviewed by the Council of Europe.

In 2003, Parliament passed a new Law on Combating Extremism, which took effect in soon after. Critics raised concerns that the law could be used to abuse opposition organizations, including religious organizations or individuals who may support or have ties to certain political parties. At the end of the period covered by this report, this law had not been used against any religious groups.

The Criminal Code, in effect since 2003, includes an article which permits punishment for "preaching religious beliefs or fulfillment of religious rituals which cause harm to the health of citizens, or other harm to their persons or rights, or instigate citizens not to participate in public life or in the fulfillment of their obligations as citizens." No organization was prosecuted under this code during the period covered in this report.

Article 200 of the Administrative Offenses Code prohibits any religious activities of registered or unregistered religions that violate current legislation. The article also allows for the expulsion of foreign citizens who engage in religious activities without the consent of authorities. The Spiritual Organization of Muslims reported being fined under this provision of law in the spring of 2004, for holding its religious services in a location registered to a charitable organization. The Government

charged that their activities were not in line with the stated activities and purposes of the charitable organization. Foreign volunteers from the Mormon Church have also been charged under this article for working illegally for an unregistered religious organization.

Foreign missionaries are permitted to enter the country for 90 days on a tourist visa. They experience the same bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining residence permits and customs clearances as other foreign workers who wish to stay in the country for longer periods.

According to the Law on Education, "moral and spiritual instruction" is mandatory for primary school students and optional for secondary and university students. Some schools offer a class on religion, although student enrollment in this course is based on parental request and the availability of funds to cover the cost of the instruction. There are a number of theological institutes, seminaries, and other places of religious education.

Two public schools and a kindergarten are open only to Jewish students, and a kindergarten in Chisinau has a special "Jewish group." These schools receive the same funding as other state schools and are supplemented by financial support from the community. However, Jewish students are not restricted to these schools. Agudath Israel operates a private boys' yeshiva and a girls' yeshiva, both licensed by the Ministry of Education. The total enrollment of both schools is fewer than 100 students. Total enrollment for all Jewish schools is approximately 300. There are no comparable schools for other religious faiths.

The law provides for restitution of property that was confiscated during the successive Nazi and Soviet regimes to politically repressed or exiled persons. This regulation has been extended to all religious communities; however, in practice, the MOC has been favored over other religious groups. The Church had little difficulty in recovering nearly all of its property and, in cases where property was destroyed, the Government offered alternative compensation. The Church has recovered churches, schools, hospitals, orphanages, and administrative properties. Property disputes between the Moldovan and Bessarabian Orthodox churches have not been resolved.

The authorities in Transnistria also impose registration requirements that negatively affect religious groups and have denied registration to some groups. In April 2004, a new draft Law on Religions, which reportedly contained numerous contentious provisions, was brought before the Transnistrian Supreme Soviet. The Orthodox Bishop of Tiraspol and some legislators objected strongly to the draft, and it was sent back for revisions. At the end of the period covered by this report, the draft awaited review in one of the Supreme Soviet's standing committees.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Law on Religions contains restrictions that have inhibited the activities of unregistered religious groups, and the Government continued to deny registration to some religious groups.

Unregistered religious organizations are not permitted to buy land or obtain construction permits for churches or seminaries. In some cases, members of unregistered religious groups held services in homes, nongovernmental organization (NGO) offices, and other locations. In other cases, the groups obtained property and permits in the names of individual members. Individual churches or branches of officially registered religious organizations are not required to register with local authorities; however, a branch must register locally in order to make legal transactions, including the right to receive donations in its name.

In February 2004, the Supreme Court overturned the Government's 2001 decision that made the MOC the successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church for purposes of all property ownership. In April 2004, in response to an appeal submitted by the Government, the Supreme Court rescinded its February ruling, making the MOC once again the legal successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church. The Bessarabian Orthodox Church, which regards itself as the legal and canonical successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church, has contested this decision and, in May 2004, it submitted the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), where it awaits examination. The registration issue has political as well as religious overtones, since it raises the question of whether the Orthodox Church should be oriented toward the Moscow Patriarchate (in the case of the MOC) or the Bucharest Patriarchate (in the case of the BOC).

In 2002, after a long series of registration denials and legal appeals, the Supreme Court of Justice ruled that the Government must register the Church of the True Orthodox-Moldova, a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), which is based in the United States. The State Service for Religions failed to imple-

ment the decision in the stipulated 30 days and subsequently asked the Court for a 2-week extension to register the church. Three weeks later, instead of registering the church, the Service filed an appeal, which was denied by the Court of Appeals. In early 2004, the Prime Minister filed another appeal, which was subsequently rejected by the Supreme Court. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Church remained unregistered. According to the State Service, the Church cannot be registered because the wording of the Court's decision obliges the Government rather than the State Service to register the Church. The Church applied for registration in 1997, 1998, and 2000; the Government rejected these applications on various grounds.

The Mormons continued to face bureaucratic obstacles to their requests for registration, including their third and most recent application in January 2004. In March 2004, the SSR requested further documentation, which the Mormons provided. In August 2004, two American citizens volunteering for a charitable organization registered by the Mormons were charged and convicted of working illegally for an unregistered religious organization. In September 2004, the Court of Appeals overturned the lower court's decision in this case and dropped all charges. Despite this ruling, the church received a letter in September 2004 from the SSR, indicating that action on its request for registration was being suspended due to a breach of the Law on Religions by members of its organization. Since that time, there has been no further action on their registration request and the SSR has given no further explanation for the delay.

The SSR has refused registration on numerous occasions to both the Spiritual Organization of Muslims and the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Moldova (the latter associated with the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Russia and CIS states). The Spiritual Organization of Muslims' most recent application for registration was filed on June 28, 2005. The Spiritual Organization of Muslims has filed a case with the ECHR against the Government for denying it registration, and the case is awaiting review. The Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Moldova filed a complaint locally against the SSR in 2002. The case was heard by the Court of Appeals, which decided in favor of the Muslim group in September 2003 and ordered the Government to register the organization. The Government subsequently appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, which returned the case to the Court of Appeals for re-examination. In March 2004, the Court of Appeals began reexamining the case. At the end of the period covered by this report, the case was still ongoing.

The Baptists reported interference from government authorities in constructing places of worship. In May 2004, authorities stopped construction of a Baptist church in the village of Capriana, which is home to the oldest orthodox monastery in Moldova, and opened an investigation into the legality of the project. The Baptists and the local mayor claim that all the necessary permits and documents, which were issued in 2001, had been obtained legally. The Baptists have addressed both district and central authorities, including the State Service for Religions, in attempts to resolve the problem.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have also reported several instances of interference in construction or renovation of houses of worship. In November 2004, the Comrat Mayor's Office refused to issue a construction permit to Jehovah's Witnesses to build a house of worship in Comrat. In September 2004, the village council of Saratenii Vechi voted to annul an earlier issued urban-planning certificate and construction permit, in order to stop the renovation of a house of worship there.

Authorities in Transnistria used registration requirements and other legal mechanisms to restrict the religious freedom of some religious groups. Evangelical religious groups meeting in private homes reportedly were told that they do not have the correct permits to use their residences as venues for religious services. In the past, they and other non-Orthodox groups generally were not allowed to rent property and often were harassed during religious services.

The Transnistrian authorities developed a textbook that is used at all school levels, which reportedly contains negative and defamatory information regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In 2002, the Tiraspol City Prosecutor filed a case to annul the registration of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Transnistria and to prohibit all of the group's activities there, despite their being legally registered three times since 1991. In response, the Transnistrian "President's" Commissioner for Religions and Cults instructed various government departments to consider the Jehovah's Witnesses illegal until the case brought against them had been finalized. At the same time, the Jehovah's Witnesses filed a suit against the Commissioner for Religions and Cults for repeatedly refusing to issue accreditation to their religious leaders. In July 2004, the Tiraspol City Court ruled to limit the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses to the city of Tiraspol and to annul its 1997 registration. However, the court also rejected the Tiraspol

public prosecutor's 2002 request to prohibit the group's activities altogether, and ruled that the Commissioner for Religions and Cults must reexamine the Jehovah's Witnesses' application for accreditation of its leaders.

Since the court's decision, the Jehovah's Witnesses community has been operating on the basis of its 1994 founding documents. In December 2004, the Tiraspol City Prosecutor notified the Jehovah's Witnesses that the church would need to reregister and obtain accreditation for its leaders, in order to continue its activities; however, the Commissioner continued to refuse to issue accreditation. The Jehovah's Witnesses filed an appeal with the Supreme Court of Transnistria in early 2005; however the Supreme Court refused to examine the case, referring the Jehovah's Witnesses back to the Tiraspol City Prosecutor. The Jehovah's Witnesses plan to address the case to the ECHR.

The Baptist community in Transnistria submitted an application for registration in 2004, which remained under review at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Spiritual Organization of Muslims reported continued harassment by the police and new problems with the Ministry of Justice during the period covered by the report. Since the spring of 2004, police have often shown up at the group's Friday prayers, which are held at the offices of the local Islamic organization Calauza, to check participants' documents and take pictures. In March 2004, the police raided their meeting place after Friday prayers, detaining several members and subsequently deporting three Syrian citizens for not having proper legal residence documents. The authorities claimed the religious services were illegal because the organization is not registered and the place they were meeting was registered to a charity and was not being used for its stated purpose. In March 2005, Calauza received a letter from the Ministry of Justice demanding that it stop the propagation of an unregistered cult.

In July 2004, the Mormons reported that police showed up at one of their religious services, which are held at the offices of their humanitarian assistance organization. The police took video and pictures of the service and questioned several participants about their activities.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists have reported numerous instances of being charged administrative fines. In one instance, local police in Gordinesii Noi fined a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses for failing to provide proper security for the Jehovah's Witnesses' meeting place, including barring the doors and windows and setting up a 24-hour watch. The Baptists have reported similar fines, despite the fact that no such requirements exist in current law. In each case the charges have been dropped upon appeal to the courts.

The Jehovah's Witnesses in Transnistria have also reported being charged administrative fines, as well as unjust arrests of their members. In all reported cases, the charges have been dropped in appeals to the Supreme Court. On October 4, 2004, at the Lipcani border crossing, a border guard seized 800 pieces of literature from two Jehovah's Witnesses, citing illegal importation as the grounds for confiscation. In November 2004, the literature was returned to the Jehovah's Witnesses after they filed a complaint with the head of the border guard unit in Tiraspol.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The dispute between the Moldovan and Bessarabian Orthodox Churches is ongoing; however, members of the respective churches do not interfere with others' freedom to worship.

Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses from various regions of the country have complained that their ability to practice their religion freely has been impeded by local town councils and Orthodox priests and adherents. They have also reported physical and verbal abuse by local townspeople, instigated by local Orthodox priests.

In the village of Rosietici, the Baptists have attempted to register and build a church for several years, but have been repeatedly refused registration by the local

mayor and town council. In the village of Hijdieni, the Baptists were refused permission to renovate a building they purchased for the purposes of a church. Local villagers broke the fence to the property and tried to vandalize the building.

In the summer of 2004, the Jehovah's Witnesses in the village of Saratenii Vechi began renovating a house for a place of worship. On August 29, 2004, as Jehovah's Witness worked on the building, 80 local townspeople along with the village priest and mayor marched to the construction site, threatening and insulting the workers. On September 1, 2004, approximately 50 people led by the village mayor reportedly forcibly entered the building and verbally and physically abused the Jehovah's Witnesses present.

There were a few reports of negative press articles about non-Orthodox religions. The Jehovah's Witnesses have been the target of articles criticizing their beliefs and legitimacy, and the Baptists in Transnistria claim press reports about their religion have been negative.

On May 3, 2005, six tombstones were destroyed in the Jewish cemetery in Chisinau. Three young men, two from Chisinau and one from Tiraspol, were arrested in connection with the vandalism. The motives for the vandalism were not clear, and the Jewish community stated that it did not believe that the incident was an act of anti-Semitism.

There has been no progress in the investigation into several anti-Semitic acts, which took place in Tiraspol in March and May of 2004. Between March 14 and March 30, 2004, more than 70 tombstones were desecrated in the Jewish cemetery in Tiraspol. Swastikas and other Nazi symbols were painted on monuments, and many tombstones were damaged beyond repair. On May 4, 2004, unknown persons attempted to set the Tiraspol synagogue on fire by throwing a Molotov cocktail onto the premises near a local gas supply. The attack failed when passers-by extinguished the fire. Transnistrian authorities believe the attacks were perpetrated by the same people.

In 2003, unknown persons destroyed eight tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Balti. However, according to a leading rabbi in Chisinau, it was not clear whether anti-Semitism motivated the event.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officers have met with leaders and legal representatives of many religious organizations to discuss registration, restitution, and other problems organizations have had with the authorities. The Embassy has raised concerns about some religious groups' persistent registration difficulties to the highest levels of the Government. The Embassy sent two diplomatic notes to the Government, expressed concern about continued delays in registering some groups as well as some religious groups being impeded from constructing houses of worship. During the period covered by this report, an Embassy Officer met several times with the head of the SSR to discuss the continued difficulties of some organizations in obtaining official registration. An Embassy representative maintains regular contact with religious leaders throughout the country.

The U.S. Ambassador met with leaders of the major religious organizations, including the MOC, BOC, Roman Catholic Church, and the Jewish community. Embassy employees maintain official or social contact with most of the resident American missionaries. The Embassy has supported the activities of religious and secular groups, and has funded several NGO projects to promote tolerance and understanding in society. In 2004, the Embassy also funded a project on freedom of religion in post-Soviet societies through the Contemporary Issues Fellowship. In 2003, the Embassy forwarded copies of Holocaust-related documents provided by the Government to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

MONACO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. Roman Catholicism is the official religion. Religious freedom, freedom of religious practices, and public expression are provided for in Articles 2, 9, and 23 of the Constitution.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government denies religious organizations regarded as "sects" permission to operate.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The principality has an area of 0.8 square miles, and its population is approximately 32,120. Roman Catholicism is the state religion, and most of the approximately 7,200 Monegasque citizens living in the principality adhere to that religion, at least nominally. There are five Catholic churches in the principality and a cathedral presided over by an archbishop. Protestantism is the next most practiced religion, with two churches. There is one synagogue in the principality. The Constitution provides the nearly 25,000 noncitizen residents in the principality the same religious freedom as citizens. Most noncitizens also adhere to either Catholicism or Protestantism, although there are some residents who practice Judaism, Islam, or other world religions. There are no mosques in the principality. No missionaries operate in the principality.

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 some restrictions. Roman Catholicism is the state religion and most citizens practice it. The Catholic ritual generally plays an important role in state festivities, such as the annual national day celebration. The Constitution provides the nearly 25,000 noncitizens who live in the principality with the same religious freedom as the approximately 7,200 citizens enjoy.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

No missionaries operate in the principality and proselytizing is strongly discouraged. However, there is no law against proselytizing by religious organizations that are registered formally by the Ministry of State. Organizations regarded as religious "sects" routinely have been denied such registration; however, there were no reports of religious organizations being denied registration during the period covered by this report.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There are no known ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions. There were no reports of societal religious violence in the principality.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

THE NETHERLANDS

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 an overall environment of religious freedom and mutual tolerance. Latent tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, however, were severely aggravated by the November 2004 killing of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh—whose work had been criticized as anti-Islamic—by a Dutch-born member of a radical Islamic group. The killing triggered multiple instances of violence against Islamic institutions and mosques, reprisals against churches, and clashes between Muslim and other youth who identified themselves as “native Dutch.” Even before the van Gogh killing, Dutch Muslims had increasingly been defending themselves against criticism for such perceived problems as the poor integration of Muslim immigrants into society, the high level of criminal activity among Muslim youth, and the conservative views of orthodox Muslims on women’s rights and corporal punishment. There were fewer anti-Semitic incidents recorded in 2004 than in previous years, and many of these appeared to have been politically motivated in reaction to developments in the Middle East.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 16,485 square miles, and its population is approximately 16.3 million. Approximately 60 percent of the population has some religious affiliation, even though many do not practice their religion actively. Approximately 31 percent consider themselves Roman Catholic, 14 percent Dutch Reformed, 6 percent Muslim, 6 percent Calvinist Reformed, 3 percent non-Christian (Hindu, Jewish, or Buddhist), and 40 percent atheist or agnostic. Other Protestant denominations include Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Protestants from the United States, and Remonstrants. Approximately 20 percent of citizens, primarily among those who have left the “traditional” churches, describe themselves as “seekers of spiritual or philosophical truths.” These persons tend to gravitate toward (although not necessarily join) newer or nontraditional religious movements, such as Pentecostal groups, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, Theosophy, or Anthroposophy.

Society has become increasingly secularized over the past several decades. According to the Government’s Social Cultural Planning Bureau, religious membership has declined steadily from 76 percent in 1958 to 41 percent in 1995 and continues to decrease, although at a slower pace. Membership is decreasing among all religions except Islam. Approximately a quarter of church members are active within their religious communities. In 2002, an estimated 25 percent of Roman Catholics, 33 percent of Dutch Reformed, 55 percent of Calvinist Reformed, and 50 percent of Muslims attended church/mosque at least once every 2 weeks. Approximately 70 percent of the total population never attends services. There are no figures for Jewish participation rates.

Research reveals that those who leave a religion rarely return. Nonetheless, significant numbers of those who have left their religions still consider themselves to be members of a religious group. The beliefs and practices of many of these adherents have developed into what some describe as a selective approach to religion, accepting what they consider the positive but not the negative aspects of a particular religion.

Following the secularization that began in the 1960s, many Roman Catholics have left the Church. Among those remaining, many express alienation from their religious hierarchy and doctrine. For example, most of the country’s Catholics express no objections to female or married priests and differ with church thinking on a number of sensitive doctrinal issues.

Dutch Protestantism is quite heterogeneous. Among the Protestant churches, the Dutch Reformed Church remains the largest, although it also has suffered the greatest losses to secularization. Church membership in this denomination has declined by two-thirds in the past 50 years. The second largest Protestant group, the Calvinist Reformed Church, has been less affected by membership losses and even has succeeded in attracting former members of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 2003, the main Dutch Protestant churches merged into the United Protestant Churches; however, a few orthodox communities refused to merge.

Thanks to a long-established climate of religious tolerance, Jews numbered more than 140,000 in 1940. Amsterdam harbored one of the largest and liveliest Jewish communities in Europe. During the Second World War, 106,000 Dutch Jews were

killed, the highest percentage in Western Europe. Of the remainder, approximately 5,000 remained in the country while the rest fled. In the post-war period, Jewish life slowly revived and flourished. While the Dutch have generally shied away from discussing this grim period of their history, Prime Minister Balkenende recently acknowledged publicly Dutch “collaboration, indifference and treason” during the war, and “the lack of humanity and understanding” towards Jews in the post-war period.

Research shows that the country counts approximately 45,000 Jews today, less than a quarter of whom belong to active Jewish organizations such as religious communities, hospitals, schools, cultural and welfare centers, sports and entertainment clubs. Since 1997, the Jewish community’s main organizations have an umbrella group, the Central Jewish Consultation, which represents the community’s interests in discussions with the Government.

The number of Muslims continues to rise, primarily because of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants marrying partners from their countries of origin. By 2004, 945,000 Muslims constituting 5.8 percent of the total population were living in the country, primarily in the larger cities, including approximately 341,000 Turks and 295,000 Moroccans. Other Muslims came from the former colony of Suriname. In the past decade, Muslim numbers further increased because of the large numbers of asylum seekers from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia. A network of mosques and cultural centers serves the Islamic community. This network is organized to conform to the national system of subsidies, which underwrites cultural activities geared to social orientation and the promotion of equal opportunities. The number of mosques has increased to approximately 400; more than half cater to Turks, approximately 140 to Moroccans, and approximately 50 to Surinamese. The founding of more than 30 Islamic schools further reflects the increased influence of Islam. Muslims are not separately organized politically. The Contact Body for Muslims and Government (CMO), representing approximately 80 percent of the Muslim community, discusses the community’s interests with the Government. The official Muslim community unanimously condemned the Van Gogh killing.

There are approximately 95,000 Hindus, of whom 85 percent originally came from Suriname and approximately 10 percent from India. The country also hosts smaller numbers of Hindus from Uganda, as well as similar movements based on such Hindu teachings as Ramakrishna, Hare Krishna, Sai Baba, and Osho. The Buddhist community is quite small, with approximately 17,000 members.

There are a small number of foreign missionary groups operating 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 Constitution permits the Government to place restrictions on the exercise of religion only on limited grounds, such as health hazards, traffic safety, and risk of public disorder.

The Government provides state subsidies to religious organizations that maintain educational facilities. The Government provides funding for education to public as well as to religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and health care facilities, irrespective of their religious affiliation. To qualify for funding, institutions must meet strict nonreligious criteria for curriculum standards, minimum size, and health care.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, the law recognizes the existence of religious denominations and grants them certain rights and privileges, including tax exemptions. Although the law does not formally define what constitutes a “religious denomination” for these purposes, religious groups generally have not experienced any problems qualifying as a religious denomination.

The law provides for religious minorities to have their views broadcast on radio and television. For example, broadcasting time has been allotted to the Islamic Broadcasting Foundation, an alliance of all Muslim groups in the country.

The Government of Turkey exercises influence within the country’s Turkish Islamic community through its religious affairs directorate, the Diyanet, which is permitted to appoint imams for the 140 Turkish mosques in the country. There is no such arrangement with the Moroccan Government. The Moroccan Government maintains connections with the approximately 100 Moroccan mosques through a federation of Moroccan friendship societies but has no mechanism to exercise direct influence in the country

The authorities have expressed concern regarding Turkish and Moroccan interference with religious and political affairs because such interference appears to run counter to government efforts to encourage integration of Muslims into society. For example, government authorities insist on strict observance of mandatory school attendance up to the age of 16 despite appeals by foreign imams to keep girls under the age of 16 at home.

To counter undesired foreign influence, the Government has begun to provide subsidies to universities providing training for local persons interested in becoming imams to ensure that they have a basic understanding of local social norms and values. Given the strict separation between the State and religion, however, the authorities themselves cannot organize such training and must depend on private organizations. In addition, the assembled Muslim organizations decided in February 2005 to found an Islamic institute to educate imams and Islamic theologians in coordination with individual university programs. Parliament has proposed phasing out the issuance of work permits to foreign imams by 2008 to increase the number and influence of locally educated religious leaders. As an interim measure, the Government has decided that all imams and other spiritual leaders recruited in Islamic countries first must follow a yearlong integration course before they are allowed to practice in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Disputes have arisen when the exercise of the rights to freedom of religion and speech has clashed with the strictly enforced ban on discrimination. Such disputes are addressed either in the courts or by antidiscrimination boards. Complaints have repeatedly been filed against religious or political spokesmen who publicly condemn homosexuality. However, longstanding jurisprudence dictates that such statements made on religious grounds do not constitute a criminal offense absent an intention to offend or discriminate against homosexuals.

The Equal Opportunities Committee (CGB) and the courts have also repeatedly addressed the wearing of headscarves in schools and places of employment. The prevailing opinion is that the wearing of headscarves may be banned only on narrow grounds, such as security considerations or inconsistency with an official government uniform. In 2003, the CGB stated that a recent ban by Amsterdam schools on wearing burqas in class is not discriminatory. The CGB stated that open teacher-student and student-to-student interaction is more important than the right to wear a burqa.

In other areas, employers have been rebuked publicly by antidiscrimination boards for failure to allow non-Christians to take leave from work on their religious holidays, for objecting to Sikhs wearing turbans or to Muslim women wearing headscarves, or for objecting to observance of food requirements on religious grounds. The CGB ruled against a company that had denied employment to a Turkish applicant because he intended to attend Friday service at a mosque. This was considered a violation of freedom of religion. According to the CGB, Friday service for Muslims is equivalent to Sunday service for Christians. It ruled that employers are obliged to take account of reasonable religious demands from their employees, except in exceptional circumstances.

In 2003, legislation took effect that explicitly permits employees to refuse to work on Sunday for religious reasons, unless the work's nature, such as in the health sector, does not permit such an exception. The legislation came in the wake of charges by the Calvinist Reformed Social Union of religious discrimination by employers and reports of job applicants being turned down for employment for refusing to work on Sundays for religious reasons.

The Government has issued a formal exception to the entry ban against Reverend and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, founders of the Unification Church, under the terms of the Schengen Treaty. The Government would not refuse the Moons entry to the country on religious grounds.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religious communities have tended to live alongside each other in harmony. Among them, the Protestant denominations in particular promote the Jewish cause and reach out to the Islamic community. However, in the fall of 2001, widespread societal resentment towards growing numbers of Muslims and their culture became apparent. Populist politician Pim Fortuyn, who was killed shortly before the 2002 general elections, received broad support for his characterization of Islam as “a backward culture” that is intolerant toward women and homosexuals and that allows practices from the Middle Ages.

The November 2004 killing of Dutch filmmaker and critic of Islam Theo van Gogh by a Dutch Muslim extremist exacerbated existing social tensions. The killing triggered a brief upsurge of violent incidents, including upwards of 30 arson attacks against mosques, Muslim schools, churches, and other property. There were numerous minor incidents, including intimidations, brawls, vandalism, and graffiti with abusive texts. Expanding pockets of both radicalized Muslim and other youth, who identify themselves as “native Dutch,” were responsible for many of these instances of violence. A number of offenders were arrested, prosecuted, and convicted. Polls revealed that popular attitudes towards Muslims were rapidly becoming more negative, and a majority now views their presence as a threat.

Muslims already faced continuing criticism for such perceived problems as the poor integration of Muslim immigrants into society, the high level of criminal activity among Muslim youth, and the conservative views of orthodox Muslims on topics such as women, homosexuals, and corporal punishment. Overcoming habitual reticence and abandoning Dutch libertarian attitudes toward religion, a number of outspoken politicians, mainly on the right, openly argue that Islam itself is incompatible with Dutch traditions and social values.

In response, the Government launched a comprehensive outreach campaign to counter anti-Muslim sentiments, stressing that the majority of Muslims fit comfortably into Dutch society. At the same time, the Government made clear that it would combat directly groups espousing violence in support of an extremist Islamic agenda. These efforts raised public awareness and triggered debate, but concerns remain about the effectiveness of the new measures.

The vast majority of the population is not anti-Semitic. Certain groups opposed to Israeli policies in the occupied territories, however, such as the Arab European League and the Stop the Occupation Movement, frequently use seemingly anti-Semitic language and images to express political views. Explicitly anti-Semitic sentiments also prevail among certain segments of the Muslim community and among fringe nationalist and neo-Nazi groups.

In its latest report covering the period between May 2003 and May 2004, the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) registered 334 anti-Semitic incidents, compared to 359 in 2002, the first decrease (7.5 percent) in anti-Semitic incidents since 2000. In addition, the number of serious incidents (physical violence, threat with violence, and defacing of cemeteries and synagogues) decreased by 40 percent. There were no serious attacks on synagogues or Jewish institutions or shops. Provisional statistics on the subsequent period confirmed this trend. A considerable number of offenders were of North African origin.

The Government has repeatedly condemned any form of anti-Semitism and has a comprehensive action plan to combat any form of discrimination. According to this plan, parents have primary responsibility for preventing anti-Semitic incidents; however, schools can also help to combat discrimination and inculcate respect and tolerance. Public debate and dialogue are other tools to achieve these goals, to which end several nongovernmental organizations have launched projects such as Een Ander Joods Geluid (An Alternative Jewish Viewpoint) to foster debate on equality, tolerance, and human dignity. Also, the Dutch Coalition for Peace has called on Jews, Palestinians, and other Muslims in the country to work together to restore peace in the Middle East.

Stricter instructions to prosecutors and the police took effect in 2003 to ensure proper attention to incidents of discrimination. Measures were also taken to deal more effectively with discrimination on the Internet. Despite these measures, critics have noted that law enforcement agencies still do not give priority to instances of discrimination. For that reason, they say, prosecutions and convictions remain rare.

The Ministry of Education has tasked schools in longstanding guidelines to teach about different religions and ideologies in conjunction with discrimination and intolerance. Explicit attention must be paid to the persecution of Jews in World War II. The Ministry of Welfare subsidizes a special program to teach children about the Second World War and the persecution of Jews. In particular, the program is designed to raise awareness about the consequences of prejudice. The Government also

seeks to promote dialogue and supports initiatives that aim to create a better understanding between Jews and Muslims. The Anne Frank Foundation published a book with “Fifty Questions on Anti-Semitism,” primarily intended for teachers in dealing with Muslim students.

The labor federations have been working to include in collective bargaining agreements stipulations that permit non-Christian employees to take leave on non-Christian holy days. Such stipulations now have been included in most agreements.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. It also engages in dialogue with all major religious groups.

NORWAY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, the state church, enjoys some benefits not available to other faiths.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 150,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.5 million. Citizens are considered to be members of the state church unless they explicitly associate themselves with another denomination; 86 percent of the population (approximately 3.9 million persons) nominally belongs to the state church. However, actual church attendance is considered to be rather low.

Other religious groups operate freely and include various Protestant Christian denominations (152,975; 3.9 percent of the population), Muslims (77,857; 1.9 percent), and Roman Catholics (46,308; 1.2 percent). Buddhists, Jews, Orthodox, Sikhs, and Hindus are present in very small numbers, together comprising less than 1 percent of the population. The Norwegian Humanist Association—the only national organization for those who do not formally practice any religion, including atheists—has 69,610 registered adult members and claims 10,000 children as associate members. Persons cannot register as full members until they reach adulthood. The Government estimates that an additional 5.6 percent of the population (roughly 252,000 persons) does not formally practice religion.

The majority of European and American immigrants, who make up approximately half of the foreign-born population, are either Christian or nonreligious, with the notable exception of Muslim refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo. Most non-Western immigrants practice Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, or Hinduism. Foreign missionaries and other religious workers operate freely in the country.

Forty-two percent of the country’s religious minorities are concentrated in the Oslo metropolitan area, including 76 percent of the country’s Muslims and the country’s entire Buddhist community.

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 Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway is the state church. It is supported financially by the State, and there is a constitutional requirement that the King and at least one-half of the Cabinet belong to this Church. Church officials and some politicians have spoken in favor of a greater separation in the state-church relationship. In 2002, the Government appointed an official State-Church Commission to re-

view the future of the state-church relationship. The commission has its own secretariat and has members from several parts of society, including different church groups and other religions, politicians, legal experts, and the Sami people. The commission is expected to present its assessment to Parliament at the end of 2005.

A religious community is required to register with the Government only if it desires state support, which is provided to all registered denominations in accordance with their membership.

There are no special licensing or registration requirements for foreign religious workers. Foreign religious workers are subject to the same visa and work permit requirements as other foreign workers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

A 1995 law introduced a course for grades 1–10 (ages 6–16) that covers world religions and philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, based on the country's history and the importance of Christianity to society, the course devotes more time to Christianity. All children must attend this mandatory class, and there are no exceptions for children of other faiths; on special grounds, students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts such as church services or prayer, but they may not forgo instruction in the subject. Organizations for atheists as well as Muslim communities have contested the legality of forced religious teaching. These organizations have contested the teaching of the subject in the courts, claiming that it is a breach of freedom of religion and parents' rights to provide religious instruction to their children. In 2002, the Humanist Association appealed the case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In November, 2004, the European Court of Human Rights decided that the practice of a mandatory religious class broke with human rights principles. In response, the Government made necessary changes to meet the European Court of Human Rights remarks, such as changing legislation to emphasize that the course is not religious preaching. The Government intends to work out a new curriculum for the course in which the rules for exemption will be made easier. These changes will be implemented in the 2005–6 school year.

In the past, Muslims have encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where Muslims are concentrated. Since 1975, the town council in Drammen had regularly turned down applications to build a mosque. However, in 2004, the Muslim community in Drammen received permission to build a mosque. No other problems with permission to construct mosques have been recorded.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits prospective employers to ask job applicants who are applying for positions in private schools, religious schools, or day care centers, whether they agree to teach and behave in accordance with the institutions or religion's beliefs and principles.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. A Cooperation Council for Faith and Secular Society includes the state church and other religious communities, including the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and secular humanist communities. The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs works to facilitate closer coordination and international cooperation on religious freedom issues, and supports projects in China, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and Indonesia aimed at developing contacts in the countries, fostering dialogues on interreligious understanding and establishing NGOs with representatives from different religions. The Ecumenical Council of Christian Communities has been active in promoting cooperation within the Christian community. There also has been cooperation between the various religious communities on human rights issues in the past several years. Bilateral dialogue between the state church and

the Muslim and Jewish communities has generated statements in support of minority rights and human rights.

Jews had reported that anti-Semitic incidents doubled from 2002 to 2003. The majority of the 40 reported incidents in 2003 involved verbal harassment of primary and secondary Jewish students by non-Jewish students. A small number of incidents involved threats against Jews. There were no reports of anti-Semitic violence or vandalism in 2004.

The Government is vigilant in fighting anti-Semitism and promoting religious tolerance. In April 2004, Prime Minister Bondevik met with two Jewish children who had been harassed on the basis of their religion and, at the conclusion of the meeting, issued a strong public statement condemning anti-Semitism and calling on the public to fight anti-Semitism more actively.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In 2004, the U.S. Embassy sponsored the participation of a U.S. constitutional law expert in an Oslo Coalition seminar on religious freedom.

POLAND

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. Jewish community leaders report no serious anti-Jewish incidents in the country over the last two years. However, there were occasional desecrations of Jewish and, more frequently, Roman Catholic cemeteries by skinheads and other marginal elements of society.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy and Consulate General Krakow officers actively monitor threats to religious freedom and seek further resolution of unsettled legacies of the Holocaust and the Communist era.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 120,725 square miles, and its population is an estimated 39 million. More than 96 percent of citizens are identified as Roman Catholic; however, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and much smaller Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim congregations meet freely.

According to the 2004 Annual Statistical Yearbook of Poland, the following figures represent the formal membership of the listed religious groups but not the actual number of persons in those religious communities; for example, the actual number of Jews is estimated at between 20,000 and 30,000, while the formal membership of the Union of Jewish Communities totals only 2,500. The Yearbook estimated that there are 34,294,521 baptized Roman Catholics; 509,100 Orthodox Church members; 82,000 Greek Catholics; 126,573 Jehovah's Witnesses; 79,050 Lutherans (Augsburg Confession); 24,025 Old Catholic Mariavits; 21,299 members of the Polish Catholic Church; 20,571 Pentecostals; 9,487 Seventh-day Adventists; 4,627 Baptists; 5,114 members of the New Apostolic Church; 110 members of Muslim associations; 910 Hare Krishnas; 4,400 Methodists; 2,800 members of the Church of Christ; 3,563 Lutherans (Reformed); 2,353 Catholic Mariavits; and 1,199 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Each of these religious groups has a relationship with the State governed by either legislation or treaty, with the exception of Jehovah's Witnesses, the New Apostolic Church, the Church of Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna), and the Church of Christ.

A 2003 public opinion poll indicates that the attitude of Poles toward religion is little changed from the last polling, conducted in 2001. Approximately 57 percent of citizens actively participate in religious ceremonies at least once per week. Nine percent of respondents declared that they have no contact with the Roman Catholic Church, an estimated 34 percent declared that they attend church irregularly or sporadically, and approximately 2 percent declared themselves to be nonbelievers. The survey also found women to be more religious than men, with 65 percent of the

former attending church regularly, compared with 48 percent of the latter. There was a slight (3 percent) decrease in the number of Poles identifying themselves with the Roman Catholic Church and an identical increase in the number of those reporting they prefer to “believe in their own way.”

Foreign missionary groups operate freely 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 Criminal Code stipulates that offending religious sentiment through public speech is punishable by a fine or up to a 3-year prison term. The Roman Catholic Church is the dominant religion in the country.

There are 15 religious groups whose relationship with the State is governed by specific legislation that outlines the internal structure of the religious groups, their activities, and procedures for property restitution. There are 144 other registered religious groups that do not have a statutorily defined relationship with the State. All registered religious groups, including the original 15, enjoy equal protection under the law and there were no reports of serious conflicts among churches or religious groups.

Religious communities may register with the Ministry of the Interior; however, they are not required to do so and may function freely without registration. According to the 1989 Law on Guaranteeing Freedom of Conscience and Belief, registration requires that the group submit the names of at least 100 members as well as other information about the group. This information on membership must be confirmed by a notary public, although the registration itself often appears to be a formality. In 2004, three new religious groups registered with the Ministry: the Muslim League of the Republic of Poland, (January); the Taoist Union (May) and the Evangelical Union of the Republic of Poland (May). All registered religious groups share the same privileges, such as duty-free importation of office equipment and reduced taxes.

Citizens enjoy the freedom to practice any faith that they choose. Religious groups may organize, select and train personnel, solicit and receive contributions, publish, and meet without government interference. There are no government restrictions on establishing and maintaining places of worship.

The law places Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox, and Protestant communities on the same legal footing, and the Government attempts to address the problems that minority religious groups may face.

Foreign missionaries are subject only to the standard rules applicable to foreigners temporarily in the country. There are no reports that missionaries were denied entry into the country.

Although the Constitution gives parents the right to bring up their children in compliance with their own religious and philosophical beliefs, religious education classes continue to be taught in the public schools at public expense. Children have a choice between religious instruction and ethics, and the Ombudsman’s office reported that in 2004, in contrast to prior years, there were no complaints regarding a lack of ethics courses in the schools. Although Catholic Church representatives teach the vast majority of religious classes in the schools, parents may request such classes in any of the religions legally registered, including Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish religious instruction. While it is not common, such non-Catholic religious instruction exists in practice, and the Ministry of Education pays the instructors. Religious education instructors, including clergy, receive salaries from the State for teaching religion in public schools. Catholic Church representatives are included on a commission that determines whether books qualify for school use.

Catholic religious holy days (Easter Monday, Corpus Christi Day, Assumption of the Virgin Mary, All Saints’ Day, Christmas, and St. Stephen’s Day) are national holidays.

In 1998, the Concordat, a treaty signed in 1993 regulating relations between the Government and the Vatican, was ratified by Parliament, signed by the President, and took effect. The vote came after years of bitter disputes between Concordat supporters and opponents. The debate centered on whether the treaty ensured the Catholic Church’s right to guarantee freedom of religion for its congregants or blurred the line between church and state. The Government and the Catholic Church participate at the highest levels in a Joint Government-Episcopate Task Force, which meets regularly to discuss Church-State relations.

The Government continues to work with both local and international religious groups to address property claims and other sensitive issues stemming from Nazi- and Communist-era confiscations and persecutions. The Government enjoys good relations with international Jewish groups. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is largely responsible for coordinating relations between the Government and these organizations, although the President also plays an important role. The Government cooperates effectively with a variety of international organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, for the preservation of historic sites, including cemeteries and houses of worship. However, contentious issues regarding property restitution and preservation of historic religious sites and cemeteries remain only partially settled.

Progress continues in implementing the laws that permit local religious communities to submit claims for property owned prior to World War II that subsequently was nationalized. The Catholic and Orthodox Churches report general satisfaction with government action to reconstitute property. A 1997 law, which mirrors legislation benefiting other religious communities, permits the local Jewish community to submit claims for such property. The law allowed for a 5-year period to file claims, the longest period allowed for any denomination. These laws allow for the return of churches and synagogues, cemeteries, and community headquarters, as well as buildings that were used for other religious, educational, or charitable activities. The laws included time limits for filing claims; these deadlines have expired in recent years, and no additional claims may be filed. However, restitution commissions composed of representatives of the Government and the religious community are continuing adjudication of previously filed claims.

The time limit for applications by the Catholic Church expired in 1991. By the end of the period covered by this report, 2,704 of the 3,063 claims filed by the Church had been concluded, with 1,495 claims settled by agreement between the Church and the party in possession of the property (usually the national or a local government) and 599 claims were rejected. Claims by the local Jewish community, whose deadline for filing claims under the 1997 law expired on May 11, 2002, number 5,544. The Commission on Property Restitution considered 714 cases, of which 253 were settled amicably and 285 properties were restored. In addition, the Jewish community has received the equivalent of more than \$1 million for properties which could not be returned. The Lutheran Church, for which the filing deadline was July 1996, submitted claims for 1,200 properties. Of these, 806 cases were heard, 222 of which were resolved amicably. A total of 220 claims were filed with the Commission for the Orthodox Church, of which 138 were closed in full or in part.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and some observers have criticized the generally slow pace of restitution of Jewish communal property and noted reluctance by the Government to return valuable properties in some cases. In contrast, restitution of Jewish communal property appears to be progressing well in cities where it has the support of the local government, such as Warsaw and Lodz.

The laws on communal property restitution do not address the issue of communal properties to which private third parties now have title, leaving several controversial and complicated cases unresolved. In a number of cases buildings and residences were built on land that included Jewish cemeteries destroyed during or after World War II.

The Government cooperates with the country's NGOs and officials of major denominations to promote religious tolerance, and lends support to activities such as the March of the Living, an event to honor victims of the Holocaust. In January 2005, the country hosted a number of world leaders, including the U.S. Vice President and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, at ceremonies commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In 2001, the Government established a department within the Ministry of Interior to monitor the activities of "new religious groups" and "cults." In April 2002, the Government closed the department; however, an employee of the Interior Ministry's Public Order Department continued to monitor religious groups.

Although the Constitution provides for the separation of religion and state, crucifixes hang in both the upper and lower houses of Parliament, as well as in many public buildings.

Public radio and television stations broadcast Catholic Mass, but only with licensure from the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Council.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Orthodox religious officials reported accounts of discrimination towards the Orthodox community. There were reports of less than proportional funds for cultural events associated with the Orthodox community, layoffs in which Orthodox employees were the first dismissed, and attitudes in the local press in some areas depicting Catholicism as necessary for true citizenship.

Anti-Semitic feelings persist among certain sectors of the population. However, there were no known anti-Semitic candidates or parties participating in elections. Isolated incidents of harassment and violence against Jews continued to occur, almost always linked to skinheads and other marginal societal groups. Occasional cases of cemetery desecration, including both Jewish and, more frequently, Catholic sites, also occurred during the period covered by this report.

The 14th March of the Living took place on May 5, 2005. An estimated 21,000 participants walked from the former Auschwitz concentration camp to the former Birkenau death camp to honor victims of the Holocaust. Schoolchildren, Boy Scouts, the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society, Polish survivors of Auschwitz, and the Polish Union of Jewish Students participated in the march. The Polish Prime Minister, Israeli Prime Minister and Hungarian Prime Minister were featured speakers at the march.

There is some public concern about the growth of groups perceived to be “sects” and the influence of non-mainstream religious groups, especially during the summer travel season when young persons travel to camps and other gatherings. Newspapers also have published articles during the period covered by this report concerning fascination with Satanism among the young.

Interfaith groups work to bring together the various religious groups in the country. The Polish Council of Christians and Jews meets regularly to discuss issues of mutual interest, and the Catholic and Orthodox Churches have an active bilateral commission. The Polish Ecumenical Council, a group that includes most religious groups other than the Roman Catholic Church, is also active. Greek Catholic leaders have expressed concern that following the death of Pope John Paul II, no one in the Vatican leadership understands the country’s situation sufficiently well to make informed decisions regarding property and doctrinal disputes. Approximately 250 Greek Catholic churches were taken over by Roman Catholic dioceses after WWII, and Greek Catholics are currently working to have that property returned. This is an internal issue between the Greek and Roman Catholic dioceses, mediated by the Pope, which does not involve the Government.

In June, the Fifth Annual Muslim Cultural Days conference was held in Gdansk. The Warsaw Islamic Council is also planning to organize an open-air Muslim cultural fair in that city in the near future. In July, the first Pomeranian Days of Ethnic Culture celebration was held in Sopot, jointly organized by the Tatar Cultural Center and the Jewish Community of Gdansk.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Representatives of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate General Krakow regularly monitor issues relating to religious freedom and interfaith relations, including Polish-Jewish relations. Embassy and Consulate officers met frequently with representatives of religious communities, the Government, and local authorities on such matters as property restitution, religious harassment, and interfaith cooperation.

Embassy and Consulate officers actively monitor threats to religious freedom. On a regular basis, Embassy and Consulate officials discuss issues of religious freedom, including property restitution, with a wide range of government officials at all levels. The Embassy and Consulate General actively urge the protection and return of former Jewish cemeteries throughout the country.

Embassy and Consulate representatives, including the Ambassador, regularly meet with representatives of major religious communities, including leaders of the Jewish community, both in the capital and during travels throughout the country.

Consulate officials attend events and monitor developments and facilitate official visits to the Auschwitz Museum, which is located near Krakow. Embassy and Consulate officers also remain in contact with and attend events associated with the Orthodox, Protestant and Muslim minorities.

The Embassy in Warsaw and the Consulate in Krakow provide continuing support for activities designed to promote cultural and religious tolerance. Those activities include press and public affairs support for the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation's education project in Oswiecim, and continued support to the annual NGO-sponsored "Days of Tolerance" in Kolobrzeg that brings together youths of various religious and ethnic backgrounds and from many countries. The majority of events conducted in Krakow's "Bridges to the East" feature tolerance as an integral part of the presentations.

PORTUGAL

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; there are a number of government and privately sponsored activities that contribute to interfaith understanding.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 35,672 square miles, and the population as of January 2005 was estimated to be 10.4 million. More than 80 percent of the population above the age of 12 identify with the Roman Catholic Church; however, a large percentage state that they do not participate actively in church activities. Approximately 4 percent identify with various Protestant denominations (including about 250,000 evangelicals), and approximately 1 percent with non-Christian religions. Less than 3 percent state that they have no religion.

Practitioners of non-Christian religions include approximately 35,000 Muslims (largely from Portuguese Africa, who are ethnically sub-Saharan African or South Asian), approximately 700 Jews, and very small numbers of Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. There is also a Hindu community of approximately 7,000 persons, which largely traces its origins to South Asians who emigrated from former colonies in Africa and the former colony of Goa in India. Many of these minority communities are not organized formally.

Government estimates suggest that there are more than 200,000 immigrants from Eastern European countries in the country. More than half of these immigrants are from Ukraine; many are Eastern Orthodox. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reports 35,000 members. Brazilian syncretistic Catholic churches, which combine Catholic ritual with pre-Christian Afro-Brazilian ritual, such as Candomble and Umbanda, also operate in small numbers, as do Seventh-day Adventists. The Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), a proselytizing church that originated in Brazil, also exists. The Church of Scientology has approximately 200 active members, primarily in the Lisbon area.

Foreign missionary groups, such as the Mormons, operate freely.

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 prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government is secular. Other than the Constitution, the two most important documents relating to religious freedom are the 2001 Religious Freedom Act and the 1940 Concordat with the Holy See.

The Religious Freedom Act from 2001, created a legislative framework for religions established in the country for at least 30 years or those recognized inter-

nationally for at least 60 years. The act provides qualifying religions with benefits previously reserved for the Catholic Church: full tax-exempt status, legal recognition for marriage and other rites, chaplain visits to prisons and hospitals, and respect for traditional holidays. It allows each religion to negotiate its own Concordat-style agreement with the Government, although it does not ensure the acceptance of any such agreements. The act also called for an independent consultative commission within the Justice Ministry to oversee the application of the act. Representatives of some religions protested the fact that the Catholic Church, although exempt from the act, was granted membership on the commission. Rules implementing this legislation took effect in 2003; however, some rules are still needed to create a registry of religious entities. No group had instituted action to reach such agreement under these rules during the period covered by this report.

The Catholic Church maintains a separate agreement with the Government under the terms of the 1940 Concordat. To comply constitutionally with the Religious Freedom Act, the Government negotiated with the Vatican and signed the new amended Concordat in May 2004. This document abrogates the previous Concordat, which had been in force for 64 years but was considered obsolete due to the changes in national life. The new Concordat was approved by Parliament in September 2004; it was approved by the President of the Republic and ratified in December 2004. The new Concordat recognizes for the first time the juridical personality of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference. The Catholic Church will be able to receive 0.5 percent of the income tax that citizens can allocate to various institutions in their annual tax returns.

Public secondary school curriculums include an optional course called "religion and morals." This course functions as a survey of world religions and is taught by laypersons. It can be used to give instruction on the Catholic religion; the Catholic Church must approve all teachers for this course. Other religions may set up such a course if they have 10 or more children in the particular school. For example, the Evangelical Alliance held 265 classes in schools during the 2004–05 school year. (No figures are available for 2004–05.) Under the 2001 Act, each religion may approve the course's respective instructors.

In 2004, the Government established a Working Group for Inter-Religious Dialogue, a task force to promote multicultural and multireligious dialogue between the Government and society. Among its objectives are fostering tolerance for religious diversity, promotion of interreligious studies, and participation in national and international religious events. The working group is led by a Government-appointed chairman and consists primarily of teachers who, by the nature of their jobs, have professional experience in this area.

Under the Concordat, major Catholic holy days also are official holidays. Seven of the country's 16 national holidays are Catholic holidays.

The Diocese of Leiria-Fatima broadcasts national Catholic programming through the Brazilian Catholic Television network, Cancao Nova.

The Government takes active steps to promote interfaith understanding. Most notably, 5 days a week the state television channel (Radiotevisao Portuguesa 2) broadcasts "A Fe dos Homens" (The Faith of Men) a half-hour program consisting of various segments written and produced by different religious communities. The Government pays for the segments, and professional production companies are hired under contract to produce the segments. Religious communities send delegates to a special television commission, which determines the scheduling of segments. The television commission has operated on the general rule that religious communities eligible for the program are those that have been operating for at least 30 years in the country or at least 60 years in their country of origin.

The Catholic Church receives 22.5 minutes of programming time per episode, while the remaining 7.5 minutes is divided among the other religions. The Evangelical Alliance receives two 7.5-minute segments per week, while other participating religions receive approximately one 7.5-minute segment per month. The Catholic Church has a program of its own called "70x7," while other religious faiths work together to schedule programming on the "Caminhos" ("Paths") broadcast every Sunday morning.

Lisbon municipal government provided matching funds for completion of the city's mosque, which was not completed at the end of the period covered by this report. The municipality also provided matching funds for the restoration of Lisbon's 19th century synagogue, considered a building of historic significance and still used by the Jewish community for religious services and cultural events. The municipality of Lisbon also provides an opportunity for the religious communities to participate in summer festival events.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Catholic Church receives some preferential treatment; for example, chief chaplaincies for the military, prisons, and hospitals remain state-funded positions for Roman Catholics only.

The Papal Nuncio is always the dean of the diplomatic corps. The Church of Scientology, although recognized as a religious association since 1986, does not benefit from the 2001 Religious Freedom Act, since it has not been established in the country for 30 years or recognized internationally for 60 years, as required under the law. Scientology leaders are concerned that exclusion from the benefits accorded under the act may have a negative effect on their ability to practice their faith; however, they reported no discrimination or opposition during the period covered by this report.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are amicable relations among the various religious communities. Participation among the various faiths in crafting the programming schedule for “A Fe dos Homens” has facilitated greater understanding and enhanced mutual respect. Many communities conduct “open houses” or sponsor interfaith education seminars.

There were no reported cases of verbal or physical attacks against Jewish persons or property during the period covered by this report.

Following the interfaith congress held in 2003 at the Catholic shrine of Fátima, representatives of the world’s leading religions explored the possibility of opening the shrine to a variety of faiths. The first steps in developing Fátima as a multifaith center were taken in May 2004, when a Hindu religious service was held at the shrine in the Chapel of the Apparitions. There have since been a number of events involving Muslims and Buddhists at the Fátima Sanctuary. As a result, a few conservative Catholic organizations have criticized the Church and called for a more traditionalist role for the Catholic shrine. However, several bishops, including the chairman of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference, have publicly dismissed the criticism.

The residents of the Azores and Madeira archipelagos, although traditionally Catholic, are also quite tolerant of other faiths. Both Mormon and Baptist missionaries are active on the islands. They are well treated and participate in Azorean and Madeiran social life.

A number of initiatives during the period covered by this report focused on the promotion of religious tolerance. In October 2004, President Sampaio participated in a rededication ceremony at the Lisbon synagogue, at which Catholic and Muslim community representatives were also present. The former Minister of State and National Defense, Paulo Portas, represented the Government on January 31, 2005, in visits to the Lisbon synagogue and mosque, where he met with the heads of the Jewish and Muslim communities. Days later, he visited the bishop of the Azorean Island of Terceira. The goal of this series of gatherings was to promote religious freedom and tolerance in liberal societies. These initiatives received significant media coverage.

The Aristides de Sousa Mendes Foundation is a nongovernmental organization established to honor the Portuguese Consul General in Bordeaux, France, who defied his dictatorial government and issued visas enabling approximately 30,000 Jews to escape through the country during World War II. The Foundation associated itself in 2004 with many events in the country and cities around the world to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Aristides de Sousa Mendes’ passing.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

have continuing contacts with leaders of the country's religious communities, including the Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim communities.

ROMANIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; while the Government generally respects this right in practice, some restrictions adversely affect religious freedom, and several minority religious groups continued to claim credibly that low-level government officials impeded their efforts at proselytizing and interfered with other religious activities.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continues to differentiate between recognized and unrecognized religions, and registration and recognition requirements still posed obstacles to minority religions. The Government did not adopt a new law regulating religions; however, a draft law on religious freedom is under debate by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and the recognized religions. Unrecognized religions have not been given any role or say in the debate. The Government has not passed legislation to return to the Greek Catholic community the churches and church property transferred by the communists to the Orthodox Church in 1948, nor has it shown any inclination to do so. An international commission headed by Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel, set up in 2003 to study the Holocaust in Romania, presented its report, conclusions, and recommendations in November 2004, and state authorities acknowledged publicly the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country. In October 2004, the country commemorated its first annual Holocaust Remembrance Day with the Government organizing public events for the commemoration. The Government also took some steps towards introducing the issue of the Holocaust in the country in school curricula. The process of granting construction permits for places of worship was shifted to local authorities. Some minority religions continued to complain of lengthy delays, which they claimed were based on their status as minority religions. Restitution of religious property continued to be slow.

Relations among different religious groups are generally amicable; however, there have been incidents where the Romanian Orthodox Church showed some hostility toward non-Orthodox religious churches and criticized the proselytizing of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups. The Orthodox Church in general continued to prevent the return of Greek Catholic churches it received from the State after the dismantling of the Greek Catholic Church by the communists in 1948.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy raised repeatedly the issue of restitution of religious properties, including Greek Catholic churches, with government officials. The Embassy also supported extensively efforts—such as the work of the Wiesel Commission, the implementation of the Wiesel Commission's recommendations, and the training of teachers to teach the Holocaust—to recognize the true history of the Holocaust in Romania. The Embassy, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, and other U.S. officials repeatedly raised with the Government the need to expand Holocaust education. The Embassy continued to encourage government and religious leaders to respect religious freedom fully.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 91,699 square miles, and its population is approximately 21.7 million.

The Romanian Orthodox Church is the predominant religion in the country. The Government officially recognizes 17 religions: the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Old Rite Christian (Orthodox) Church, the Reformed (Protestant) Church, the Christian Evangelical Church, the Romanian Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Augustinian Church, the Lutheran Evangelical Church-Synod Presbyterian, the Unitarian Church, the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Armenian Church, Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah's Witnesses (first recognized as a religion in 2003). Members of other faiths worship freely but are not afforded various forms of state support.

According to the 2002 census, the Romanian Orthodox Church had 18,817,975 members (86.8 percent of the population). The Roman Catholic Church had 1,026,429 members. The Catholic Church of Byzantine Rite (Greek Catholics or

Uniates) had 191,556 members. This figure is disputed by the Greek Catholic Church, which claims that there were many irregularities such as census takers refusing to note Greek Catholic affiliation and automatically assuming Orthodox affiliation, which led to an inaccurate result. The Greek Catholic Church estimated in 2003 that its adherents numbered more than 790,000. (Greek Catholics were former members of the Romanian Orthodox Church who in 1697 accepted principles required for union of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church, but continue to maintain many Orthodox observances and traditions).

The Old Rite Christian (Orthodox) Church had 38,147 members. The Protestant Reformed Church had 701,077 members. The Christian Evangelical Church had 44,476 members. The Romanian Evangelical Church had 18,178 members. The Evangelical Augustinian Church had 8,716 members. The Lutheran Evangelical Church Synod-Presbyterian had 27,112 members. The Unitarian Church of Romania had 66,944 members. The Baptist Church had 126,639 members. The Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church) had 324,462 members. The Seventh-day Christian Adventist Church had 93,670 members. The Armenian Church had 687 members. There were 6,075 Jews, according to the 2002 census. The Jewish Community Federation states that they have approximately 10,200 members. Romanian Muslims, mostly Turks and Tartars, have 67,257 members. Jehovah's Witnesses, which did not have legal status as a recognized religion at the time of the census, are estimated to have approximately 80,000 members and associates. According to the same census, the number of atheists was 8,524, and there were 12,825 persons who did not have any religious affiliation.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, most religions have followers dispersed throughout the country, although a few religious communities are concentrated in particular regions. Old Rite members (Lippovans) are located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Most Muslims are located in the southeastern part of the country in Dobrogea, near Bulgaria and the Black Sea coast. Most Greek Catholics are in Transylvania, but there is also a large Greek Catholic community in Moldavia. Protestant and Catholic believers tend to be in Transylvania, but many also are located around Bacau. Orthodox or Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians are mostly in the northwestern part of the country. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are in Banat. Armenians are concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Members of the Protestant Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Unitarian churches in Transylvania are virtually all ethnic Hungarians.

According to published sources, the Baha'i Faith, the Family (God's Children), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Unification Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, and Zen Buddhism have active branches in the country; however, they are not recognized officially.

According to a nationwide poll conducted by Gallup Organization Romania in May 2005, 1 percent of the respondents stated they go to church on a daily basis; 3 percent attend services several times a week; 19 percent stated they go to church once a week; 17 percent claimed to go to church several times per month; 34 percent of the respondents stated that they go to church only at Christmas and Easter; 5 percent claimed they go to church once per month; 9 percent attend services once a year or less; 11 percent responded they do not go to church at all. In the same poll, 83 percent of the respondents stated that the church is the institution they trust most.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, the Government exercises considerable influence over religious life through laws and decrees. The Orthodox Church exercises substantial influence in its dominant role among a majority of the population and policymakers. Government registration and recognition requirements still pose obstacles to minority religions. Several minority religious groups continued to claim credibly that low-level government officials and the Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts at proselytizing and interfered with other religious activities.

A communist-era decree, number 177 of 1948, remains the basic law governing religious denominations. It allows considerable state control over religious life. Technically almost none of the articles of this law have been abrogated formally; however, according to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, a large number of its articles have been nullified in practice by the Constitution and a series of governmental decrees. Although several religious denominations and religious associations confirmed that articles stipulating the State's interference with or control over

religious life and activities have not been enforced, such provisions still exist in the law.

The Government requires religious groups to register. There is no clear procedure for the registration of religious groups as religions. The Government has refused to recognize a number of religious groups since 1990. After a long period of persistent refusal to enforce a 2000 Supreme Court ruling that ordered that Jehovah's Witnesses be recognized, the Government granted the Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a recognized religion in 2003.

The total number of recognized religions remains low. Under the provisions of Decree 177 of 1948, the Government recognized 14 religions; subsequently, it added the Greek Catholic Church (1989) and the Jehovah's Witnesses (2003). The Romanian Evangelical Church and the Christian Evangelical Church were listed originally as one religion but are now considered two separate fully recognized religions, bringing the total to 17. Recognized religions are eligible for state support; they have the right to establish schools, teach religion in public schools, receive government funds to build churches, pay clergy salaries with state funds and subsidize clergy's housing expenses, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, apply for broadcasting licenses for denominational frequencies, and enjoy tax-exempt status.

The Government registers religious groups that it does not recognize either as religious and charitable foundations or as cultural associations. Until 2000, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations licensed 622 religious and charitable foundations, as well as cultural organizations, under Law 21 of 1924 on Juridical Entities, thereby entitling them to juridical status as well as to exemptions from income and customs taxes.

Government Decree 26 of 2000 on associations and foundations abrogated Law 21 of 1924 and eliminated most of the bureaucratic obstacles, including the minimum requirement of members needed to establish religious associations and foundations, and the requirement of the mandatory approval by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, in the registration process. In 2003, the Government reintroduced mandatory approval by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations for the registration of religious associations. In 2004, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations issued 113 approvals under this decree and 23 in the first half of the year. There were no reports that any applications were denied during the period covered by this report.

The number of adherents of each recognized religion in the 2002 census determines its state-provided budget. The Orthodox religion receives the largest share of governmental financial support. In addition, Orthodox religious leaders generally preside over state occasions. In 2004, the Government allocated financial assistance (for various purposes, including the priests' salaries) amounting to almost \$8.9 million (ROL 291,480 million) to the Orthodox Church, approximately \$970,000 (ROL 31,855 million) to the Roman Catholic Church, close to \$180,000 (ROL 5,905 million) to the Greek Catholic Church, and approximately \$326,000 (ROL 10,660 million) to the Reformed Church.

The law governing the rights of foreigners, revised in 2003, introduced a long-stay visa for religious activities. Visa requirements include approval by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, evidence that the applicants represent a religious organization legally established in the country, certification of medical insurance, and a criminal record review. To grant this approval, in May 2004 the Ministry asked religious groups to provide religious workers' professional histories, documents to prove their qualifications to develop religious activities and represent a religious group in the country of origin, and reasons for their presence in the country; however, this requirement was reportedly not implemented. The law no longer limits visa extensions to 6 months, a change considered positive by most religious groups. Although the law provides for up to 5-year visa extensions, the Jehovah's Witnesses complained that their missionaries were granted only 2-year and even 1-year extensions and the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations stipulated that extensions for longer periods can be granted only if "the presence of foreign missionaries is justified by their programs and projects." There are penalties for any foreigner who stays without a visa, but such penalties do not appear to be linked to religious activities. The State Secretariat reported that 966 visas and visa extensions were approved for religious workers in 2004, and 218 were approved in the first 6 months of 2005.

In February 2005, a government decree cancelled the requirement of construction permits for places of worship issued by a special commission of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs. Since February, to build places of worship, religious denominations need only the permits required for any construction, which are obtained at the local level. There were reports of unjustified opposition by local au-

thorities to granting such permits to minority religions. Prior to February, the special national commission was in charge of issuing construction permits for places of worship.

The Government did not adopt a new religion law to replace communist era legislation. In February 2005, the opposition Social Democratic Party (PSD) submitted to Parliament a draft law on religious freedom. The new Government drafted a separate version that by mid-year remained under review by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and the officially recognized religions.

Minority religious groups assert that central government and parliamentary officials are more cooperative than local officials.

Following a 1999 Supreme Court ruling, the Ministry of Education no longer requires Adventist students to come to school or take examinations on Saturdays.

During the period covered by this report, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, in partnership with the independent nongovernmental organization (NGO) Conscience and Liberty, sponsored meetings on religious freedom issues in various counties every two months, with the participation of all religious denominations, local authorities, and representatives of the State Secretariat. To foster a permanent dialogue in religious life, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations met with representatives of religious groups on a regular basis and attended the meetings of the leading bodies of some religious denominations. In October 2004, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations sponsored consultations with European experts on the religious freedom law.

The National Anti-Discrimination Council (CNCD), established to curb discrimination of any kind (including on religious grounds), received nine complaints of discrimination on religious grounds in 2004, and seven in the first five months of period covered by this report. In three of these cases, the CNCD decided to reprimand those found guilty of religious discrimination, and in a fourth one the CNCD fined the culprit \$220 (ROL 6 million).

Christmas and the Orthodox Easter are national holidays. Members of the other recognized religions that celebrate Easter on a different date are entitled by law to have an additional holiday. Religious leaders occasionally play political roles. In particular, many Orthodox leaders make public appearances with prominent political figures, and religious messages often contain political promises or goals, and support for particular political positions.

Most mainstream politicians have criticized anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia publicly. Both former President Ion Iliescu and members of the former cabinet, as well as incumbent President Traian Basescu and the new cabinet members, made public statements on various occasions against extremism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, and criticized attempts to deny the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country. In January 2005, President Basescu attended the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp in Poland. In March 2005, Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu participated in the inauguration of Yad Vashem's new Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem. President Basescu also publicly pointed to the need for an accurate rendering of the Holocaust in Romania in school curricula. Two government decrees were issued in 2002 to combat anti-Semitism, ban fascist, racist, and xenophobic organizations prohibit the personality cult of war criminals; and protect Jewish cemeteries and synagogues.

In accordance with one of the 2002 decrees, three statues of the country's pro-Nazi World War II leader Marshal Ion Antonescu located on public land were taken down and a square was renamed in 2002. Most of the Marshal Antonescu streets nationwide were renamed. One street in Cluj continued to bear the name of Antonescu due to the failure of the former mayor, a leader of the extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party, to replace the street sign. Several months after the defeat of the extreme nationalist mayor in June 2004, the street sign was changed. The street sign of the Antonescu Street in Targu Mures was removed in spring 2005, following a decision by the municipal council. A street named for Antonescu continues to exist in Cimpulung Muscel. In 2003, the Government inaugurated a Holocaust memorial in Targu Mures, a Transylvanian town under Hungarian administration in World War II.

In 2003, the Government established an international commission on the Holocaust in Romania, headed by Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel and consisting of 30 Romanian and foreign historians, to study the consequences of the Holocaust in Romania. The objective of the commission was to examine the history of the Holocaust in Romania to identify the facts that took place during the Holocaust and to disseminate the research results in the country and abroad. The organization of the commission—commonly called the Wiesel Commission—followed public statements made earlier in 2003 by then President Ion Iliescu who minimized the Holocaust in Romania, and by former Information Minister Vasile Dincu who denied the Holo-

caust in Romania. Iliescu subsequently asserted his comments had been misinterpreted, and the Government set up and fully supported the Commission. In November 2004, the Wiesel Commission presented its report. Iliescu praised the balance and objectiveness of the report, publicly accepted its conclusions, and underscored the need for the country to come to terms with its past. The Wiesel Commission's recommendations included the Government's reversal of the previous rehabilitation of Nazi war criminals; establishment of a national Holocaust Remembrance Day; construction of a national Holocaust memorial and museum in Bucharest; and enforcement of 2002 legislation making Holocaust denial a crime. In addition, the Commission recommended *inter alia* the comprehensive inclusion of the accurate history of the Holocaust in school curricula and textbooks.

Education on the country's role in the Holocaust continued to be limited, and treatment of the Holocaust in textbooks remained inconsistent, although the Government took steps to address these issues. The Government continued a program on Holocaust education introduced in 2002 at the National Defense College. In addition, according to the Ministry of Education, during the period covered by the report, the Holocaust was taught during history classes, under the subject World War II, in the seventh and eleventh grades. The Ministry of Education reported that in addition a course on the "History of the Jews: Holocaust," taught for the first time in school year 2004–05, was offered as an elective in 200 high schools (roughly 25 percent of the total number of high schools). A report by the Ministry of Education mentioned that the Ministry modified the curriculum of the course to be in line with the recommendations of Yad Vashem experts and the Wiesel Commission. Nonetheless, the Center for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism in Romania (MCA), an NGO affiliated with the U.S.-based Anti-Defamation League, criticized the course for insufficiently focusing on the Holocaust in Romania. The MCA also expressed concern that the textbook lacks concrete, relevant, and crucial data.

The Holocaust in Romania is explicitly mentioned for the first time in general school curricula for the tenth grade, which were adopted in 2004 and will be implemented in the school year 2005–06. According to the Ministry of Education, the description of the Romanian Holocaust as it is taught is in line with the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. The Government set up centers at universities in Cluj, Bucharest, Iasi, and Craiova, and a teachers' association in Bacau to train approximately 100 history teachers per year to teach the Holocaust. In addition, teachers received training between 2000–04 in cooperative programs operated by the Ministry of Education and Yad Vashem Institute, Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (Paris) and the Holocaust Museum in Washington. The total number of teachers trained on this topic, however, remained small. Throughout the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Education continued to distribute books in schools to be used as supplementary material in the teaching of the Holocaust; however, the number of books supplied was insufficient. The Ministry of Education sponsored several international seminars on the Holocaust and the teaching of history in 2004 and in May 2005.

In May 2004, the Foreign Intelligence Service signed an agreement with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to grant access to its archives for research regarding the Holocaust.

In May 2004, in line with the recommendation later contained in the Wiesel Commission's report, the Government established an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day to take place on or around October 9, the anniversary of the first deportation of Jews from southern Bukovina to Transnistria. In October 2004, the Government commemorated this date for the first time. Political leaders laid wreaths at a Holocaust memorial in the courtyard of a synagogue in Bucharest and held an ecumenical religious service in Parliament. The Ministry of Education also sponsored a series of events to commemorate the Holocaust in schools.

In December 2004, former President Iliescu awarded the nation's highest honor, the "Order of the Star of Romania," to extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM) leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor, known for making numerous xenophobic and anti-Semitic comments. Iliescu also decorated a well-known Holocaust denier, PRM Vice Chairman Gheorghe Buzatu, with the prestigious "Faithful Service" award. The granting of awards to these two individuals generated a wave of protest. As part of this protest, Elie Wiesel announced his decision to resign from the Order, an honor he received from former President Iliescu in 2002, stating that he "cannot belong to any group of which Vadim Tudor is a member." Separately, a group of 15 Radio Free Europe journalists decided to return the awards they also received from Iliescu. In March 2005, President Traian Basescu created new honorary boards for the country's decorations, which have the authority to review all awards previously granted. To date, the awards decorated to the PRM leaders have not been

rescinded, although Buzatu also suggested that he might return his award, not wanting to hold the same award as Elie Wiesel.

In its 2004 Report on Nazi War Criminals, the Simon Wiesenthal Center included the country among those in which the investigation of Nazi war criminals was insignificant during the period under review. In 2002, the Parliament passed legislation that could bar the return to the country of Romanians who participated in Nazi war crimes but left the country during or after World War II. This includes individuals who lied about their participation in atrocities to obtain nationality in other countries, notably the United States. The U.S. Embassy and other U.S. officials expressed strong concern about this legislation as well as the refusal of the country to accept the return of war criminals, noting that it represented a failure of the country to recognize the participation of its nationals in the Holocaust and to accept official responsibility.

The Government did not take any action to reverse the 1997 decision by the Supreme Court to rehabilitate two war criminals, Col. Radu Dinulescu and Col. Gheorghe Petrescu, who previously had been convicted of direct complicity in activities associated with the Holocaust in Romania.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There is no law against proselytizing, nor is there a clear understanding by the authorities of what activities constitute proselytizing. Although protected by law, several minority religious groups, which include both recognized and unrecognized religions, made credible complaints that low-level government officials and Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts to proselytize, interfered in religious activities, and otherwise discriminated against them during the period covered by this report. Few politicians sponsor bills and measures that would oppose the Orthodox Church, because of its substantial influence. Local officials tend to be tolerant, but there have been incidents where they have been pressured or intimidated by Orthodox clergy. In some instances, local police and administrative authorities tacitly supported societal campaigns (a few of which involved physical intimidation) against proselytizing by non-Romanian Orthodox religious groups.

Representatives of religious groups that sought recognition after 1990 alleged that the registration process was arbitrary and unduly influenced by the Romanian Orthodox Church, and that they did not receive clear instructions concerning the requirements. The Organization of the Orthodox Believers of Old Rite, the Adventist Movement for Reform, the Baha'i Faith, and the Mormons were some of the religious groups that tried unsuccessfully to register as religions after 1990. Local leaders of the Baha'i Faith stated that, during the period covered by the report, they did not seek registration because of the absence of legislation to allow it. It took the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs 3 years to recognize Jehovah's Witnesses on the basis of a 2000 court ruling.

One explanation given by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations for the failure to register new religions was that recognition requires a decree issued by the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, a communist-era institution that no longer exists. Since no new legislation has been passed in this regard, the State Secretariat stated that the registration of any new religion was not possible.

Unrecognized religions receive no financial support from the State, other than limited tax and import duty exemptions, and are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities.

In addition, representatives of several minority religious groups complained that allocation of off-budget funds (special funds maintained by the Government, supposedly for emergency use) is biased toward the Romanian Orthodox Church. According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, off-budget funds are distributed according to the needs of the various religious denominations. Most minority religions reported that the national commission granted them permits to build places of worship without any difficulty, when the commission's approval was still required prior to February 2005. Minority religions, however, continued to encounter difficulties in obtaining construction permits at the local level. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that in some localities, mayors and municipal councils obstructed their plans to build places of worship by illegally conditioning permits on the agreement of all neighbors in the area or claiming that only certain types of construction can be built in a particular district. Such cases occurred in Calarasi (Calarasi County) in August 2004 and in Odorheiu Secuiesc (Covasna County) and Panciu (Vrancea County) in January 2005. In Bals (Olt County) and Feldioara (Brasov County), the mayors refused to issue the construction permits in 2003, and Jehovah's Witnesses took the issue to court. In Bals, the court ruled against Jehovah's Witnesses in spring, and in April 2005, Jehovah's Witnesses applied again for a construction permit. A decision was pending by the end of the period covered in

this report. In Feldioara, following a court ruling in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses, the mayor eventually issued the permit. Similar situations occurred in a number of other locations. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Carlibaba (Suceava County) reported a similar case in which the church was denied a building permit by the mayor on the grounds that the number of believers was too few to warrant a church; the mayor had denied the permit repeatedly since the land purchase in 2000. The Baptist Church also reported similar cases.

In 2004, the Commission approved 196 applications for the construction of places of worship. Of the 196 permits, 101 were granted to the Orthodox Church, 4 to the Catholic Church, 11 to the Greek Catholic Church, 12 to the Baptist Church, 19 to the Pentecostal Church, 8 to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 28 to Jehovah's Witnesses, and the rest to other religions. Of the total number of applications, 15 were rejected, 12 belonging to the Orthodox Church, 2 to the Pentecostal Church and 1 to the Reformed Church. With the change of legislation in February 2005, the commission was no longer in charge of issuing such permits.

The law does not prohibit or punish assembly for peaceful religious activities. However, several minority religious groups complained that local authorities and Orthodox priests prevented religious activities from taking place, even when the groups had been issued permits. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported difficulties in obtaining approvals to use public halls for religious activities following pressure by Orthodox priests. Even when they had rented public halls, on many occasions, local authorities, pressured by Orthodox priests, forced the Seventh-day Adventist Church to discontinue or cancel its religious programs, for example, in Vladia (Vaslui County). In some villages along the Siret River Valley, Orthodox priests pressured mayors to suspend healthcare activities sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in rented halls. During the period covered by the report, Jehovah's Witnesses won 16 lawsuits against mayors that continued to demand taxes for land and places of worship, although Jehovah's Witnesses had been granted religion status. In Saliste, the Jehovah's Witnesses continued to be faced with discriminatory attitudes. In October 2004, the mayor accused them of "illegally carrying out religious activities" and "aggressive religious proselytizing." Despite an official complaint filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs did not take any measures against the local authorities. The Mayor's Office in Saliste also demanded taxes for the Jehovah's Witnesses' places of worship; the latter challenged the city hall decision in court.

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Attendance in classes is optional. Only the 17 recognized religions are entitled to hold religion classes in public schools. While the law permits instruction according to the faith of students' parents, some minority recognized religious groups complain that they were unable to have classes offered in their faith in public schools. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Baptist Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report such cases. According to minority religious groups, the local inspectors for religion classes are typically Orthodox priests who deny accreditation to teachers of other religions. According to Baptist reports, in some cases, school directors denied access in their schools to teachers of neo-Protestant religions. Religious teachers are permitted to instruct only students of the same religious faith. However, minority religious groups, including the Baptist Church, credibly asserted that there were cases of children pressured to attend classes of Orthodox religion. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also complained that the School Inspectorate of Cluj County included in the school curriculum only one of the requested three classes on Adventist religion, although there were sufficient students for three full classes. In addition, the Baptist Church reported that, at some festivities in public schools, all students, irrespective of their religious affiliation, must attend Orthodox religious services. The same reportedly happened in the Army.

The Religious Assistance Division in the Ministry of Justice submits an annual report on religious assistance in prisons to the Ministry of Justice and the Orthodox Patriarchate. Only recognized religions are entitled to give religious assistance to prisoners, and regulations on the organization of religious assistance in penitentiaries forbid proselytizing. The prison priest (always an Orthodox priest) coordinates religious assistance in prisons. Minority recognized religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, asserted that Orthodox priests denied them access to some penitentiaries.

The law entitles recognized religions to have military clergy trained to render religious assistance to conscripts. However, according to minority religions, with the exception of two representatives of the Catholic Church and Evangelical Alliance, the military clergy is comprised only of Orthodox priests.

In 2002, the Parliament passed legislation restituting religious properties confiscated by the communist regime. Some religious or communal property already

had been returned to former owners as a result of government decrees or with the agreement of local religious leaders. The center-right government in office between 1996 and 2000 issued four decrees and a government decision, which resulted in the restitution of 100 buildings to religious and national minorities. One of the decrees (94/2000) subsequently became the basis of law 501/2002, described below.

In many cases, religious minorities have not succeeded in regaining possession of the properties despite restitution by these decrees. Many properties returned by decree house government offices, schools, hospitals, or cultural institutions that would require relocation, and lawsuits and protests by current possessors have delayed restitution of the property to rightful owners.

Law 501/2002 should provide for the restitution of all church properties. The buildings used by public institutions (such as museums, schools, and hospitals) are to remain in tenants' hands for a period of 5 years, during which time they are to pay rent to the churches. The majority of church properties belong to this category. However, this law does not address the distinctive and sensitive issue of the Greek Catholic churches, which were confiscated under communist rule in 1948 and handed over to the Orthodox Church. Some religious denominations criticized the law for failing to include a provision to give other buildings in compensation for those that have been demolished. By the final deadline of March 2, 2002, religious denominations submitted 7,568 applications for restitution, according to Law 501, as follows: Orthodox Church, 770; Roman-Catholic Church, 992; Greek Catholic Church, 2,207; Reformed Church, 899; Jewish, 1,809; Evangelical Church, 690; other denominations, 201. The national commission for Law 501 started its activity in 2003 and had restituted 737 buildings, 258 of which were restituted during the period covered by this report.

The Greek Catholic Church was the second largest denomination (approximately 1.5 million adherents out of a population of approximately 15 million) in 1948 when communist authorities outlawed it and dictated its forced merger with the Romanian Orthodox Church. At the time of its banning, the Greek Catholic Church owned more than 2,600 churches and monasteries, which were confiscated by the State and then given to the Orthodox Church, along with other facilities. Other properties of the Greek Catholic Church, such as buildings and agricultural land, became state property.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, after 1989 the Greek Catholic Church regained control more than 194 of the churches transferred by the communists to the Orthodox Church; the Greek Catholics claim that they have received only 178 such properties. The Greek Catholic Church has very few places of worship. Many followers still are compelled to hold services in public places (more than 150 cases, according to Greek Catholic reports) or in the open (at least 2 such cases were reported). In 1992, the Government adopted a decree that listed 80 properties (that were not places of worship) owned by the Greek Catholic Church to be returned. After the restitution of 60 to 65 properties, including schools and hospitals (the most important buildings, including three schools in Cluj were not restituted), no further progress was made. In some cases, Orthodox priests whose families had been Greek Catholics converted back to Greek Catholicism and brought their parishes and churches with them to the Greek Catholic Church. In several counties, in particular in Transylvania, local Orthodox leaders gave up smaller country churches voluntarily. For example, in the early 1990s in the Diocese of Lugoj in the southwestern part of the country, local Orthodox Church representatives reached agreement on the return of an estimated 160 churches; however, for the most part, Orthodox leaders refused to return churches to the Greek Catholics. Between July 2004 and April 2005, the Greek Catholic Church recovered only two churches, a sharp decline in numbers compared to the previous year.

In the early 1990s, the Orthodox Archbishop of Timisoara, Nicolae Corneanu, returned approximately 50 churches, including the cathedral in Lugoj, to the Greek Catholic Church. However, because of his actions, the Orthodox Holy Synod marginalized Archbishop Corneanu, and his fellow clergymen criticized him.

A 1990 government decree set up a joint Orthodox and Greek Catholic committee at the national level to resolve the situation of former Greek Catholic churches. The committee met for the first time in 1998, had three meetings in 1999, and then met annually after 2000, but the Orthodox Church resisted efforts to resolve the problem in this forum. The courts refused in many cases to consider Greek Catholic lawsuits seeking restitution, citing the 1990 decree establishing the joint committee to resolve the issue. In August 2004, however, the Government amended the 1990 decree that stipulated dialogue as the only means to decide on the situation of the confiscated Greek Catholic churches to give to the Greek Catholic Church the right to go to court whenever dialogue fails. The new Parliament, elected in November 2004, rejected the amending decree but the President refused to sign the rejection law and

sent it back to Parliament for revision in March 2005, arguing that the restitution of Greek Catholic churches is one of the political criteria for the country's EU accession. The amending decree was pending Parliament's revision and passage as a law. In the interim, the Government's August 2004 amendment remained in force.

In early June 2005, the Prime Minister, together with the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs, discussed the restitution of Greek Catholic churches with the Orthodox Patriarch, who had promised to restitute two cathedrals in Oradea and Gherla. The promise to restitute was for an unspecified date, only "after the completion of repair and restoration works," in addition to a promise "to restitute in a symbolic manner" a church in Bucharest. Neither promise produced tangible results, and according to the Greek Catholic Church, the local Orthodox hierarchs refused to consider any restitution proposals of the churches in question.

From the initial property list of 2,600 seized churches, the Greek Catholic Church has reduced the number of its claims to fewer than 300. According to Greek Catholic reports, only 16 churches were restituted as the result of the joint committee's meetings. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations reported that 34 churches were restituted through dialogue between the two religions. Restitution of the existing churches is important to both sides because local residents are likely to attend the church whether it is Greek Catholic or Orthodox. Thus the number of members and share of the state budget allocation for religions is at stake.

All meetings of the joint committee followed the same pattern: the Greek Catholic Church would reiterate its core claim, i.e. the restitution of its former cathedrals and district churches, and the return of one church in localities where there are two churches and one of them belonged to the Greek Catholics; whereas the Orthodox Church would reply that the will of the majority of believers should be taken into account with regard to restitution, and restitution problems should be solved by dialogue. It would also call for an end to all ongoing lawsuits and would argue that the construction of new churches is the only solution to existing conflicts. The dialogue was interrupted in 2004, however, when the committee did not meet, apparently because the Orthodox Church was not satisfied with the answer of the Greek Catholic Church to a letter that urged it to choose between dialogue and court actions.

Despite the stated desire for dialogue, the Orthodox Church has demolished Greek Catholic churches under various pretexts. For example, Greek Catholic churches (some of them historical monuments) were demolished in Vadu Izei (Maramures County), Baisoara (Cluj County), Smig (Sibiu County), Tritenii de Jos (Cluj County), Craiova (Dolj County), and Urca (Cluj County). Another church that continued to be threatened with demolition was in Ungheni (Mures County). In this instance, the Orthodox Church continued construction of a new church, which was being built around the Greek Catholic Church. Despite a court order to halt construction, the Orthodox Church continued work close to the church of a famous Greek Catholic Monastery of Nicula (Cluj County). Over a number of years, the Orthodox Church repeatedly rejected the Greek Catholic requests for alternating service in a total of 227 localities. According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, the 2 churches hold alternate services in 24 localities. The Government failed to keep its 2002 promise to help the Greek Catholic Church build 50 new wooden churches.

The Special Commission for the Restitution of Real Estate that Belonged to Religious Denominations, using Law 501/2002, had returned 63 of the 2,207 reclaimed buildings to the Greek Catholic Church, 10 of which were returned during the period covered by this report.

In April 2005, Greek Catholic believers in the country and throughout the world redistributed a memorandum, addressed in 2002 to the President, Prime Minister, and other state authorities complaining about discrimination against their Church and calling for the restitution of the Greek Catholic churches and other assets confiscated under communist rule. The only reaction by the authorities came from the State Secretary for Religious Denominations, who sent a letter to the authors of the memorandum, declaring that the issue of the Greek Catholic churches was complex and sensitive and that the establishment of the commission for dialogue was a wise solution. The State Secretary stated that a Government-sponsored bill amending the law restituting religious property would solve this problem. However, the bill refers to the restitution of churches that are in the possession of the State, while Greek Catholic churches pending restitution are in the possession of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

In October 2004, then President Ion Iliescu was received by Pope John Paul II, who discussed the relationships among Christian religions in the country and expressed concern about Catholic Church properties, in particular those of the Greek Catholic Church.

Local and state authorities also ignored letters and appeals complaining about discrimination against the Greek Catholic Church, sent by Greek Catholic bishops and priests in 2003 and in January and February 2004. The authorities did not respond to street protests by Greek Catholics in 2003.

Even when courts accept lawsuits regarding Greek Catholic churches, in many cases restitution was not granted. For example, in March 2004 after a 14-year long lawsuit, a Bucharest court of appeal rejected the restitution claim for the most important Greek Catholic Church in Bucharest, despite recognizing that the Greek Catholic Church owned the church. The Supreme Court accepted an appeal by the Greek Catholic Church and returned the case to a lower court for revision. The case was pending at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

Historical Hungarian churches, including Roman Catholic as well as Protestant churches (Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian), have received a small number of their properties from the Government. Churches from these denominations were closed but not seized by the communist regimes. However, the communist regime confiscated many of these groups' secular properties, which still are used for public schools, museums, libraries, post offices, and student dormitories.

Approximately 80 percent of the buildings confiscated from Hungarian churches are used as public facilities (schools, hospitals, or museums.) Of the 1,630 buildings confiscated by the communist regime from Hungarian churches, only 33 were restituted by government decrees between 1996 and 2000. However, Hungarian churches could not take possession of all of them because of lawsuits and opposition of current occupants. For example, restitution under Decree 13 of 1998 of the Bathyanaeum Library (which had belonged to the Roman Catholic Church) was delayed by lawsuits. Despite a 2003 court ruling in favor of the Roman Catholic Church, the building was not restituted. The church filed a complaint with the ECHR right after the issuance of the court ruling, and a decision was pending. The Roman Catholic Church submitted a complaint to the new Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs in winter 2005. The Roman Catholic Bishop's palace in Oradea was partially restituted in 2003, according to a protocol between a local museum, its current user, and the Roman Catholic Bishopric. A potential solution was under negotiation to find a building to relocate the museum. To date the Special Commission for the Restitution of Real Estate that Belonged to Religious Denominations, using Law 501/2002, had restituted 388 of the more than 1,450 reclaimed buildings to the Hungarian Churches, with 48 buildings restored during the period covered by this report. The Hungarian churches were dissatisfied with the slow pace of restitution under this law. The Mayor of Cluj reportedly opposed the restitution of three buildings to the Unitarian Church, all of which the Church should have received in December 2004 under the law on religious property. The Mayor's Office challenged the decisions in court, which still ruled in favor of the Unitarian Church. It then tried and appealed the court ruling twice; a decision on the last appeal was pending.

The Jewish community has received 42 buildings by government decree. Of these structures, the community took actual, partial, or full possession of 32 buildings. In many cases, restitution was being delayed by lawsuits. The community was able to reclaim land only in Iasi, where it received 15 pieces of land (of former synagogues and schools) between 1999 and 2000. However, 21 land claims of the Jewish community remained unresolved in Iasi, including a piece of land that, although claimed by the Jewish community in 1998, was divided and distributed to other persons by the prefect. Under Law 501/2002, to date 55 additional buildings were returned to the Jewish community, of which 17 were restituted during the period covered by this report.

In March 2004, Parliament adopted a law amending a previous government decree, which restituted a limited number of properties to ethnic communities, including the Jewish community. The law stipulates the restitution of all buildings that belonged to ethnic communities and were confiscated between September 6, 1940, and December 22, 1989. As in the case of religious properties, buildings used for the "public interest" will remain in the hands of the present users for 5 years. By the deadline of September 30, 2004, ethnic communities submitted 1,930 claims, of which 1,744 belong to the Jewish community. At the request of the Jewish community, the new law extended the period of the confiscation of properties to include the interval between 1940 and 1945, when the pro-Nazi government seized a large number of Jewish properties. As was earlier the case, the new law does not provide compensation for properties that no longer exist. Restitution under this law did not start during the period covered by the report.

Another problem with restitution is often a refusal by the occupant to return a property or pay rent for occupancy. The nominal owner still can be held liable for payment of property taxes in such cases.

According to Law 1 of 2000, religious denominations are entitled to claim between 25 to 250 acres of farmland (depending on the type of religious unit-parish, eparchy, bishopric), and up to 75 acres of forestland from properties seized by the communists. Enforcement of the law continued to be slow.

Amendments to the Constitution enacted in October 2003 allow the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the State. However, this provision was not implemented.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In October 2004, the country commemorated its first Holocaust Remembrance day. In November 2004, the conclusions of the report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania were publicly accepted by state authorities. The Government took some steps toward introducing the study of the Holocaust of the Romanian Jews in the school curricula.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups. There is no law against proselytizing. However, the Romanian Orthodox Church repeatedly criticized the so-called "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church repeatedly described as "sects." This led to conflicts in some cases. The press also reported several cases in which adherents of minority religions were prevented by others from practicing their faith, and local law enforcement authorities did not protect them. The New Right (Noua Dreapta) organization (a small, right-wing group with nationalistic, xenophobic views) harassed Mormons verbally and sometimes physically in several cities around the country. In 2003, New Right members picketed an open house meeting in Bucharest. The police intervened to protect the meeting.

The predominance of the Orthodox Church over the last several hundred years, along with its status as the majority religion, has contributed to its reluctance, in particular at the local level, and sometimes with the support of low-level officials, to tolerate other religions. Consequently, actions by other religious groups to attract members frequently are perceived by the Orthodox Church as attempts to diminish the number of its members. Minority religious groups alleged that some members of the Orthodox clergy provoked isolated incidents of organized group intimidation.

Jehovah's Witnesses continued to allege verbal and physical abuse from persons incited by some Orthodox priests, who often took an active part in these actions. In some instances, the priests reportedly had the support of local authorities and the police, such as in Dofteana (Bacau County), where in April 2004 the mayor, apparently under influence of the Orthodox priest, obstructed activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The mayor took to the police a group of Jehovah's Witnesses ministers who were going from door to door and accused them of violating two local ordinances forbidding door vending and fund raising. He interpreted the ordinances as meaning no one could approach the people of the village at their homes without prior approval from the local administration. The mayor warned Jehovah's Witness to stop their door-to-door ministry. Despite complaints filed with the city hall, local and national police, and the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, the mayor continued this discriminatory conduct. The Ministry did not take any measures, and harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses continued in this locality.

Tensions with the Orthodox Church reportedly continued in Mizil, a small town with a small congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The congregation was subjected to a persistent discrediting campaign by the local Orthodox Church throughout 2004. The mayor, along with the Orthodox priests and the police, continued a vehement anti-Jehovah's Witnesses campaign started in 1997, seeking to forbid their activity. Despite the complaints filed by Jehovah's Witnesses with the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and the police in the summer of 2004, in November 2004, the mayor issued a resolution forbidding any actions of proselytizing. In January 2005, the city hall's monthly newsletter also started a campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses. In November 2004, a local primary school teacher in Mizil was

threatened with dismissal by the school director, following accusations by the mayor of “religious proselytizing” in school. The mayor also filed a complaint with the Prahova County School Inspectorate, and school inspectors told the teacher that he had to choose between teaching and his religion. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Center for Legal Resources, a human rights NGO, filed complaints, in January and April 2005 respectively, against the mayor, the inspectors, and the School Inspectorate with the CNCD, which, following investigations, concluded that the authorities discriminated against and harassed the teacher. The CNCD decided to reprimand the mayor, the inspectors and the School Inspectorate. The mayor was additionally fined approximately \$220 (ROL 6 Million).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported similar incidents with Orthodox priests in several localities, including Milas (Bistrita Nasaud County), where in the fall of 2004, a group of Adventist believers from a neighboring village came for a series of presentations. They were denied access to a hall and subsequently went to a private house. The mayor accompanied by a group of local people warned them to leave the village, saying they were not wanted there. Tensions calmed down after the Conference of the Adventist Church sent a letter to the mayor. In March 2005, an Adventist religious activity in Milas could not take place because of the opposition of a group of local people headed by the mayor and the Orthodox priest. The local policeman stated that he could not protect the Adventists because of the large number of villagers opposing their activity. In Pitesti, for several years, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had problems with an Orthodox priest, who repeatedly took the missionaries’ name tags and broke them. On April 7, 2005, he took a Book of Mormon and a Bible from the hands of a missionary and destroyed them. He later stated, during a meeting between the missionaries and the police, that he would continue to act in this manner as long as missionaries come in the area of his church since he claimed to be responsible for preventing people from leaving his church. Police reportedly delayed sanctioning the priest.

The Reformed Church in Oradea alleged that local authorities incited an inter-confessional and interethnic conflict by allocating a sports playground, which had, according to the Reformed Church, rightfully belonged to a reformed high school, to a local Orthodox parish in September 2004. The local Orthodox parish intensified the conflict by locking up the playground, restricting access to the students and rendering the high school in a state of de facto limbo.

Minority religions credibly complained about the intolerant attitude of some Orthodox religion teachers, who in some instances have depicted non-Orthodox churches to students as “sects” and a danger for all those who might want to join them.

At the end of November 2004, unidentified persons vandalized a Baptist church in Caracal (Olt County) twice. Police failed to identify the perpetrators.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church complained that Orthodox priests allowed the burial of non-Orthodox believers in confessional or even public cemeteries (often treated as confessional by Orthodox priests in rural areas) only if religious services specific to other religions were not performed. To avoid such encounters, the Adventist Church asked the mayors’ offices for land for cemeteries in a large number of localities where it had congregations, but it received positive answers to only 12 of its 700 requests. Orthodox priests also denied access to Greek Catholics to cemeteries in Sapanta, Bicazul Ardelean, and Pesceana.

According to the local Muslim community, Bucharest City government failed to respond to repeated requests by the Muslim community for land for a Muslim cemetery. This has led to difficulties in locating a proper burial ground for Romanian Muslims. The Muslim community has engaged in prolonged negotiations with local authorities and has identified appropriate land for a cemetery. However, the Muslim community continued to encounter bureaucratic deadlock in receiving final authorization for the cemetery.

In January 2005, a group of villagers from Pesceana, along with the Orthodox priest, switched to the Greek Catholic Church. Following this, the local council illegally refused to register the parish, and local police did not react to the Greek Catholics’ complaints of physical and verbal violence. The Prefect of Vilcea County also refused to give any guarantee of safety to the Greek Catholics. In February 2005, the Ministry of Administration and the Interior dismissed the chief of the local police precinct for having organized an anti-Papal and anti-Catholic demonstration. The State Secretary for Religious Denominations asked the Greek Catholic Metropolitan in February 2005 to reverse the appointment of the former Orthodox priest as Greek Catholic priest in this parish. The police and the mayor tried to pressure the Greek Catholic believers to declare that they were cheated into signing the list of adherents to the Greek Catholic Church. Several NGOs filed a complaint with the Ministry of Administration and the Interior regarding alleged abuse committed by state authorities against the Greek Catholic group and notified the

CNCD. The CNCD representatives investigated the facts in April 2005, and a decision was pending. The State Secretary for Religious Denominations also visited the site of the conflict and urged the parties involved to solve the conflict in a peaceful manner. The Greek Catholics continued to be denied access both to their former Orthodox church and to the cemetery. Despite a promise by the State Secretary for Religious Denominations that the Greek Catholics would be allowed to enter the cemetery, violent incidents occurred again on May 21, when the Greek Catholic priest was physically abused by the police when trying to enter the cemetery. On May 24, to defuse tensions in the locality, the State Secretary for Religious Denominations and the Prefect of Valcea County mediated a protocol between the two Churches, promising the allocation of land for the construction of a church and a cemetery to the Greek Catholic Church within a month of the signature of the protocol. Both parties denounced the protocol within a week of its signature, with the Orthodox Church refusing to accept the existence of the Greek Catholic parish in the locality and the Greek Catholic Church refusing to give up the right of its members to go with their priest to the graves of their family members.

Representatives of minority religions credibly complained that only Orthodox priests grant religious assistance in hospitals, children's homes, and shelters for the elderly. Charitable activities carried out by other churches in children's homes and shelters were often interpreted as proselytizing.

Since the dialogue between the Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches came to a halt in 2004, disputes between the two religions' believers over church property increased not in number but in intensity. Greek Catholic communities decided, in many cases, to build new churches because of lack of progress in restituting their properties either through dialogue with the Orthodox Church or in court; however, their efforts were obstructed by the Orthodox Church, sometimes with the support of local authorities. For example, in Sapinta, where the Greek Catholic Church decided to give up claims for its church and build a new one, the Orthodox priest continued to use his influence to bar the approval of the construction plans for a new Greek Catholic church. The Greek Catholic Church initiated a lawsuit. Similar tensions continued in Certeze (Satu Mare County), where the Greek Catholic Church was not permitted to build a new church on its land because of obstructions and harassment by the Orthodox Church and local authorities. Tensions continued in localities where the Orthodox Church refused to enforce a court ruling ordering the restitution of churches to the Greek Catholic Church, as in Tigvaniul Mare (Caras Severin County), for example.

In Prunis (Cluj County), where most of the residents belong to the Greek Catholic Church, tensions continued because of a long-standing lawsuit. In Mihalt (Alba County), after long lasting disputes with the Orthodox Church after renouncing their claim to their former church, the Greek Catholics were finally able to start the construction of a new church with funds provided by the Government.

In Ardud, the Greek Catholic Church, which previously had owned the only church in the locality, built a new church to put an end to the long-standing conflict. However, the Orthodox Church took legal action and evicted the Greek Catholic priest (who had been an Orthodox priest) from the parish house in 2003 in the presence of numerous gendarmes and police. The Orthodox Church refused the Greek Catholics' proposal to help buy a new house for the Orthodox priest.

In most localities with two churches (one of which had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church) and only one Orthodox priest, priests frequently do one of three things: hold religious services in turns in both locations, keep the Orthodox church locked and hold the services in the former Greek Catholic churches, or establish a second Orthodox parish in the locality. However, more than 10 former Greek Catholic churches remained closed.

The Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs granted museum status to churches in Sieu and Bogdan Voda (Maramures County) instead of supporting the enforcement of final court rulings restituting the former Greek Catholic churches.

In Racovita, where a final court ruling had not been enforced for a long period of time because of the opposition of local priest and the mayor, the church was eventually restituted by court order during the period covered by the report.

In April 2005, in Satu Mare, authorities continued to fail to enforce a long-standing ruling restituting a cathedral to the Greek Catholic Church. The Orthodox Church circumvented enforcement by establishing a second parish to conduct religious services in the cathedral, claiming that the Greek Catholic Church had won a lawsuit only against the original parish.

In Bicsad (Satu Mare County), where the Greek Catholics obtained a government decision restituting a former Greek Catholic monastery, the Greek Catholic Church could not take possession of the monastery because of opposition from the local Or-

thodox clergy. Local authorities have not supported enforcement of the Government's decision.

In Dumbraveni, the Orthodox Church continued to refuse to enforce a previous court ruling to share a local church with the Greek Catholic Church. Short-term prospects for the return of the Greek Catholic church were dim, since restitution was contingent on construction of a new Orthodox church, which was expected to take many years. Greek Catholic sources alleged that the construction works were deliberately slowed down.

The fringe press continued to publish anti-Semitic articles. The Legionnaires (also called the Iron Guard, an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi group that existed in the country in the interwar period) continued to publish books from the inter-war period and Iron Guard magazines. In February 2005, an Iron Guard monthly "Obiectiv Legionar" (Legionnaire Focus) was distributed in Parliament, where the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the Senate called on the Bucharest Prosecutor's Office to ban the publication of the monthly. The magazine, which began publication in 2003, carries mostly old legionnaire literature and is distributed by the state-owned press distribution company, which also distributes another legionnaire publication, "Cuvintul Legionar" (Legionnaire Opinion), in several of the largest cities, including Bucharest.

In March 2005, a university professor in Sibiu published an article denying the Holocaust in Romania.

In July 2004, authorities charged an individual with distributing nationalistic-chauvinistic and fascist propaganda; the trial was in progress at the end of the period covered by this report. During a search, the police found a large number of neo-Nazi flyers, magazines, and extreme-right publications in the defendant's home. Similar materials were found on the hard disk of his computer.

A contributor to one of the legionnaire magazines, the Timisoara-based "Gazeta de Vest" (Western Gazette), was sentenced in 2003 to 30 months' imprisonment for dissemination of nationalist-chauvinistic propaganda and fascist symbols.

The New Right organization (also with legionnaire orientation) continued to sponsor yearly marches, followed by religious services, to commemorate Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Legionnaire Movement. The latest took place in November 2004.

In March 2004, a private television station, National TV, broadcast a talk show on "Gypsies, Jews, and Legionnaires," which voiced xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and racist opinions. One of the participants, the leader of an extremist organization, wore the legionnaire uniform. National TV did not react to a protest sent by the Jewish Communities Federation in Romania regarding this show.

In August 2004, Nazi and anti-Semitic signs were found on the inside of the walls of the Jewish cemetery in Sarmasu (Cluj County). The incident remained under investigation.

In October 2004, around the time of the first Holocaust Remembrance Day, there were several attempts by extremists to minimize the commemoration. A well-known Holocaust denier voiced anti-Semitic views on the private television station National TV. In addition, participants in a meeting of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives denied during the meeting the existence of the Holocaust in Romania. The extreme nationalist New Generation Party adopted for its electoral campaign a slogan used by the 1930s anti-Semitic Legionnaire Movement: "I swear to God to make Romania into a country like the holy sun in the sky."

In December 2004, the metal hood used to cover a Marshal Antonescu statue located in the yard of an Orthodox church in Bucharest was removed and replaced by a tri-color ribbon. The slogan, "Antonescu—national hero," was written on the church wall close by. The perpetrator was not identified. Following complaints by the Jewish community to the General Police Inspectorate, the Offices of the Bucharest Prefect and Mayor, and the Prosecutor's Office to the Supreme Court, the statue was covered again and the graffiti removed. In December 2004, the Organization of Jewish Youth in Timisoara received threatening and intimidating anti-Semitic messages. On December 31, 2004, neo-Nazi graffiti were discovered on the door of the home of a member of the Bucharest Jewish community. He filed a complaint with the police. Perpetrators were not identified. In January 2005, Nazi symbols and anti-Semitic graffiti were found on a building in Suceava inhabited by a married couple that survived the Holocaust. Similar symbols were found on a garage in Galati in April 2005. In January 2005, police and prosecutors in Buzau initiated criminal prosecution against a 17-year-old for creating an anti-Semitic website inciting violence against two teenagers of the Jewish community in that town.

In February 2005, four Torah scrolls were stolen from a synagogue in Iasi. The police found all four in a local antique store and returned them to the Jewish community. In May 2005, nine graves were desecrated in a Jewish cemetery in Ploiesti.

The Jewish community filed a complaint with the local police. On May 17, 2005, a synagogue was desecrated in Radauti; nothing was stolen but the Torah scrolls were vandalized. The Federation of the Jewish Communities notified the state authorities of these incidents.

Unidentified persons broke into a synagogue in Bacau and broke its windows in March 2004. The perpetrators could not be identified but were believed to have been local youths, rather than members of an organized anti-Semitic movement. Non-Jewish cemeteries in Bucharest were vandalized in a similar manner.

Anti-Semitic graffiti were written on the walls of the Jewish theater in Bucharest and on downtown buildings in Cluj in 2002. Thieves broke into the Jewish temple in Vatra Dornei in 2002. The synagogue in Focsani was desecrated in 2002. Five Jewish cemeteries were desecrated in locations throughout the country in 2003. Perpetrators have not been identified in these cases.

According to MCA Romania, the authorities have a tendency to minimize the significance of such incidents, usually explaining them as being the actions of children, drunkards or persons with mental disorders.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government actively discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy also maintains close contact with a broad range of religious groups in the country. The Ambassador, and other U.S. Embassy representatives, regularly met with religious leaders and government officials who work on religious affairs in Bucharest and in other cities.

In July 2004, the Embassy financed the travel of four high school teachers to a course in the United States for teaching the Holocaust. The Embassy also funded a 120-hour training course for high school teachers on racism, xenophobia, and Holocaust education for high school teachers between September 2004 and May 2005.

Throughout the period covered by the report, Embassy representatives and other U.S. Government officials discussed with government officials at multiple levels the importance of full official recognition of the Holocaust in Romania, improvements in Holocaust education in school curricula, and implementation of the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. The Embassy participated in the first commemoration of the country's Holocaust Remembrance Day and issued a press statement noting the importance of the commemoration. The Embassy supported visiting delegations focusing on issues related to the Holocaust, including the Wiesel Commission. Embassy personnel and visiting U.S. officials repeatedly discussed the Holocaust in Romania with local and international members of the Wiesel commission and supported the work of the commission. During a visit in March 2005, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Ambassador Edward O'Donnell discussed with the Government officials ways to implement the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission report and to expand Holocaust education. In April 2005, the visiting Chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of American Heritage Abroad met with numerous Romanian officials to urge among other issues the construction of a Holocaust memorial, as recommended by the Wiesel Commission, in a prominent location in Bucharest.

The Embassy also supported activities in the country of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, including in the latter's successful efforts to obtain extensive archival information from the Romanian National Archives.

On repeated occasions, the Ambassador and other Embassy officials raised concerns about the slow restitution of religious properties, in particular of Greek Catholic churches, with government officials, including the President, Prime Minister, and the Minister of Culture and Religious Affairs. Members of the Embassy's Office in Cluj had meetings with Reformed, Evangelical, Greek Catholic, Jewish, and Orthodox officials in Cluj and Oradea, discussed restitution of religious properties, and participated in a seminar at Cambridge University's Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies. In May 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution urging the Government to recognize its responsibilities to provide equitable, prompt, and fair restitution to all religious communities for property confiscated by the former Communist government in the country.

In May 2005, the Embassy sponsored a series of seminars on religious freedom, tolerance, and interconfessional dialogue in Bucharest, Sibiu, Oradea, Baia Mare, and Targu Mures.

In addition Embassy staff members were in frequent contact with numerous NGOs that monitor developments in the country's religious life. U.S. officials continued to lobby in government circles for fair treatment on property restitution issues,

including religious and communal properties, and for nondiscriminatory treatment of all religious groups.

RUSSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. Although the Constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

Conditions deteriorated for some minority religious faiths while remaining largely the same for others, although government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. Some federal agencies and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law “On Freedom of Conscience and Associations” continued to seriously disadvantage many religious groups considered nontraditional. Indeed, these restrictions were cited as the basis for the March 2004 court decision banning Jehovah’s Witnesses in Moscow, a decision that had significant negative ramifications for the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses during the reporting period. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats.

Religious matters are not a source of social tension for most citizens, although many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is at the heart of the national identity. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as hostility toward Roman Catholics and other non-Orthodox denominations. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it often was difficult to determine whether xenophobic, religious, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other religions considered nontraditional. ROC leaders have stated publicly their opposition to any expansion of the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other non-Orthodox denominations.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and engages a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a steady dialogue on religious freedom. The Embassy and consulates work with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly support the implementation of these programs. The Embassy and consulates maintain a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings. Consular officers routinely investigate criminal, customs, and immigration cases involving foreign citizens to determine whether they involve possible violations of religious freedom, and also raise the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). During the reporting period, the U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He also attended events on major religious holidays and often met with a range of religious leaders. Other Department of State and U.S. Government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 6,592,769 square miles, and its population is approximately 144 million. There are no reliable statistics that break down the population by denomination. Available information suggests slightly more than half of the residents consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians, although the vast majority are not regular churchgoers. There are an estimated 14 to 20 million Muslims, constituting approximately 14 percent of the population and forming the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga-Urals region—which includes Tatarstan and Bashkortostan—and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia have Muslim populations as well. The Muslim communities in the Volga-Urals region and the North Caucasus are cul-

turally and theologically distinct from one another, which has led to a split in the Muslim community. Muslims in the Volga-Urals region tend to view Islam through a cultural prism, whereas Islam in the North Caucasus is increasingly politicized.

By most estimates, Protestants constitute the third largest group of believers. An estimated 600,000 to 1 million Jews remain (0.5 percent of the population) following large-scale emigration over the last 2 decades; the Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC) estimates that up to 500,000 Jews live in Moscow and 100,000 in St. Petersburg. These estimates significantly exceed the results of the official government census. Between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews live in the so-called Jewish Autonomous Oblast (region), located in the Far East. Buddhism is traditional to three regions: Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya, and the Buddhist Association of Russia estimates there are between 1.5 and 2 million Buddhists. In some areas, such as Yakutia and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or alongside majority religions.

According to the most recent Ministry of Justice (MOJ) statistics available, there were 21,664 registered religious organizations as of May 2004. The figures show an increase of approximately 1,000 registered organizations since 2002 and more than 5,000 since 1997. The MOJ recorded the number of registered religious groups as follows: Russian Orthodox Church—11,525 groups, Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church—41, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad—45, True Orthodox Church—24, Russian Orthodox Free Church—16, Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate)—11, Old Believers—284 (representing 4 different Old Believer denominations), Roman Catholic—248, Greek Catholic—5, Armenian Apostolic—60, Muslim—3,537, Buddhist—192, Jewish—267 (divided among Orthodox and Reform groups), Baptist—979, Pentecostal—1,467, Seventh-day Adventist—646, other evangelical and charismatic groups—134, Lutheran—219 (divided among 4 groups), Apostolic—81, Methodist—105, Reformist—5, Presbyterian—176, Anglican—1, Jehovah's Witnesses—386, Mennonite—9, Salvation Army—32, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)(Mormon) Church—50, Unification Church—9, Church of the "Sovereign" Icon of the Mother of God—27, Molokane—28, Dukhobor—1, Church of the Last Covenant—11, Church of Christ—26, non-denominational Christian—24, Scientologist—2, Hindu—1, Krishna—80, Baha'i—20, Tantric—2, Taoist—6, Assyrian—2, Sikh—1, Shamanist—14, Karaite—1, Zoroastrian—1, Spiritual Unity (Tolstoyan)—1, Living Ethic (Rerikhian)—1, pagan—11, other confessions—216.

The number of registered religious organizations does not reflect the entire demography of religious believers. For example, due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register or reregister.

An estimated 500 (official estimate) to more than 9,000 (Council of Muftis' estimate) Muslim organizations remain unregistered; some reportedly are defunct, but many, according to the Council of Muftis, have concluded that they did not require legal status and have postponed applying for financial reasons. Registration figures probably also underestimate the number of Pentecostal churches. As of May, the Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith estimated that there were nearly 2,000 registered and unregistered Pentecostal churches, 62 regional associations, and about 300,000 believers. As of May 2004, the official number of registered Pentecostal organizations was 1,467. The difference in numbers can be explained by the fact that many Pentecostal churches remain unregistered.

Some religious groups registered as social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations. The Unification Church reported that the drop in its registered organizations from 17 in 2003 to 5 as of the end of the reporting period was due to local authorities hindering the church's attempt to reregister its local organizations. The Moscow Monthly Friends' Meeting (Quakers) is an officially registered organization, although as of June, it apparently was registered under "other faiths," as there was no Quaker organization listed in the MOJ registry.

In practice, only a small minority of citizens identify strongly with any religion. Many who identify themselves as members of a faith participate in religious life rarely or not at all.

Representatives of Muslim religious organizations operate, as do a large number of foreign missionaries, many from Protestant denominations.

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, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. The Constitution also provides for the equality of all

religions before the law and the separation of church and state; however, the Government did not always respect this provision.

The 1990 law on freedom of religion helped facilitate a revival of religious activity. The 1990 law declared all religions equal before the law, prohibited government interference in religion, and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Registration of religious groups was not required, but groups could obtain a number of advantages by registering, such as the ability to establish official places of worship or benefit from tax exemptions.

A new law in 1997, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, replaced the 1990 law. Although the 1997 law does not recognize a state religion, its preamble recognizes Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and other religions as constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage, and also recognizes the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." Public opinion widely considers Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism to be the only religions "traditional" to the country.

Neither the Constitution nor the 1997 law accords explicit privileges or advantages to the four "traditional" religions; however, many politicians and public figures argue for closer cooperation with them, above all with the ROC's Moscow Patriarchate. The ROC has entered into a number of agreements, some formal, others informal, with government ministries on such matters as guidelines for public education, religious training for military personnel, and law enforcement and customs decisions, giving the ROC far greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, the FSB, and the army. In November 2004, the ROC and the MVD extended an earlier agreement pursuant to which the two entities cooperated in efforts to combat extremism, terrorism, and drug addiction. Such efforts included, for example, ROC support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones and the holding of religious services for those serving there.

Many government officials and citizens equate Russian Orthodoxy with the national identity. This belief appears to have manifested itself in the church-state relationship. For example, the ROC has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Internal Affairs, and Emergency Situations, and other bodies, such as the Federal Tax Service, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces under the President. Not all of the details of these agreements are accessible, but available information indicates that the ROC receives more favorable treatment than other denominations. Public statements by some government officials and anecdotal evidence from religious minorities suggest that increasingly since 1999, the ROC has enjoyed a status that approaches official. For example, during President Vladimir Putin's April State of the Nation address, Patriarch Aleksey II was seated in a place of honor between Prime Minister Fradkov and the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, whereas the leaders of the other traditional religions were seated behind him. Election campaign teams often include the ROC clergy who frequently play a special role at official events at both the local and national level, and who support a close relationship with the State. Nonetheless, policymakers remain divided on the State's proper relationship with the ROC and other churches.

The Rodina Duma faction and single-mandate deputies representing the People's Party have consistently supported a more official status for the ROC. The President, who, in contrast with his predecessors has openly spoken of his belief in God, acknowledged major Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist religious holidays with greetings to those communities. He also meets periodically—most recently in September 2004—with members of the President's Council on Cooperation with Religious Organizations, which includes representatives of traditional religions, and other major religious communities, such as the Protestants and Catholics, to discuss anti-terrorism issues.

The 1997 law ostensibly targets so-called "totalitarian sects" or dangerous religious "cults," by making it difficult for members of less well-established religions to set up religious organizations. Many officials in law enforcement and the legislative branches speak of the need to protect the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include Protestant and newer religious movements. The 1997 law is very complex, with many ambiguous provisions, and it creates various categories of religious communities with differing levels of legal status and privileges. Most significantly, the law distinguishes between religious "groups" and "organizations." A religious "group" is not registered and consequently does not have the legal status of a juridical person; it may not open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish lit-

erature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals and among the armed forces. However, individual members of a group may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In this way, groups theoretically are permitted to rent public spaces and hold services; however, in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encounter significant difficulty in exercising these rights.

The 1997 law provides that a group that has existed for 15 years and has at least 10 citizen members may register as a "local organization." It acquires the status of a juridical person and receives certain legal advantages. A group with three functioning local organizations in different regions may found a "centralized organization," which has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without meeting the 15-year-rule requirement.

The 1997 law required all religious organizations registered under the more liberal 1990 law to reregister by December 31, 2000. In practice, this process, which involves simultaneous registration at the federal and local levels, requires considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded domestic religious organizations began to reregister soon after publication of the 1997 regulations; however, some Pentecostal congregations refused to register out of philosophical conviction, and some Muslim groups decided that they would not benefit from reregistering—according to spokespersons for the two most prominent muftis.

Under a 1999 amendment to the law, groups that failed to reregister became subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), i.e., deprivation of juridical status. By the deadline for reregistration, an estimated 2,095 religious groups were subject to dissolution, and the MOJ reported that by May 2002, approximately 980 of them had been dissolved. The MOJ asserted that most such organizations were defunct, but religious minorities and NGOs contended that a significant number were active. Complaints of involuntary dissolution have decreased in recent years, possibly because those who fought dissolution have already taken their cases to court; however, a few groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvation Army, and Scientologists are still fighting their cases through the court system.

In November 2004, the President signed amendments to the tax code that exempted religious organizations from paying land taxes.

In January, the 1997 law was amended to conform to a new law on state registration of other legal entities. The amended law requires all registered local religious organizations to inform the Federal Registration Service Department (FRSD) within 3 days of a change in its leadership or legal address. If a local organization fails to meet this requirement on two or more occasions, the FRSD can file suit to have the organization dissolved and stricken from the registry. Some denominations with numerous local organizations fear that compliance with this law will be highly burdensome.

The 1997 law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups. Unlike dissolution, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits all of the activities of a religious community. The law has not been used to ban many groups to date. However, in a notable exception, the decision of a Moscow court judge in June 2004 to uphold on appeal the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses garnered much media coverage and prompted an upswing in restrictions on Jehovah's Witnesses. As of mid-May, authorities permitted registration of Jehovah's Witnesses groups in 397 local communities in 72 regions, but problems with registration continued in other communities, notably Moscow.

A lack of specific guidelines accompanying the 1997 law contributed to inconsistent application at the local and regional levels. Local officials, reportedly often influenced either by close relations with local ROC authorities or the FSB, sometimes refused outright to register groups or created prohibitive obstacles to registration. There are indications that the Procurator General encouraged local prosecutors to challenge the registration of some minority religious groups.

The LDS Church succeeded in registering 50 local religious organizations as of the end of the reporting period. In 2003, the LDS Church was registered in Chelyabinsk following a series of rejections of its application for registration and a lawsuit. The group has neither been able to register a local religious organization in Kazan, Tatarstan since 1998, nor in Tver despite numerous attempts.

Although the Constitutional Court found earlier rulings by Moscow courts dissolving the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army to be unconstitutional, the Moscow Oblast MOJ had not reregistered the organization by the end of the reporting period, and two of the court judgments whereby the applicant branch was legally dissolved remained in force, despite the ruling of the Constitutional Court. In a separate case, the Presnenskiy District court ruling against the Salvation Army's registration has not yet been upheld, and according to the Salvation Army's Moscow

office, it continued to operate based on documents filed under the old statute. In the preface of the Presnenskiy court's ruling, the Salvation Army is referred to as a "militarized organization." A textbook on religious culture prepared for use in schools repeats this definition of the Salvation Army, which it calls a "sect." The Slavic Center for Law and Justice (SCLJ) has agreed to help the Moscow organization get the Presnenskiy Court ruling repealed and is working with the Salvation Army. The European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in June 2004 that the group's complaint that it had not been allowed to reregister was admissible; however, the court declared the rest of the complaints inadmissible. As of the end of the reporting period, a decision on the merits was pending.

The Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology continued to be denied reregistration by the Moscow authorities and faced threats of dissolution. The Scientologists countered the MOJ contention that the Church had failed to reregister by the deadline by citing the 2002 Constitutional Court ruling in favor of the Salvation Army. Despite the court ruling against dissolution, the Government filed a supervisory appeal to the Supreme Court, which was granted, and the case was remanded back to the trial court for new proceedings, where the court found in the Government's favor. In February, a Moscow appeals court ordered Moscow Oblast officials to permit the church to submit an application for reregistration and to examine the application on its merits. Prior to this decision, the Church of Scientology had filed a suit with the ECHR against the dissolution order, which the ECHR found admissible in October 2004.

In response to local authorities' repeated refusal to register the St. Petersburg branch of the Church of Scientology, the Church filed suit. A hearing scheduled for May 26 was postponed for procedural reasons until June 24; due to the illness of the presiding judge, the June 24 hearing was postponed indefinitely. Local authorities have impeded the operation of Scientology centers in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Starting in 2002, the Khabarovsk Dianetics Center initiated a series of proceedings to appeal a dissolution order issued by the Khabarovsk regional Ministry of Justice based on money laundering charges. While these proceedings were taking place, the Church of Scientology formed and registered a new organization in Khabarovsk, which has been operating without interference from the regional authorities. The Church of Scientology in Surgut City filed a suit with the ECHR against the refusal of officials to register the church, a suit which the ECHR found admissible in June.

The Council of Muftis indicated that registration is not an issue for Muslim organizations, and some regional Muslim organizations continued to operate without registration, such as the 39 of 47 Muslim communities in the Stavropol region that operate without registration despite affiliation with a recognized regional Muslim administration. The regions of Kabardino-Balkariya and Dagestan have laws banning extremist religious activities, described as "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups. The regional government in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the strongest Islamic areas, continued to encourage a Tatar cultural and religious revival, while avoiding instituting confrontational religious policies. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Tatarstan Government has funded the construction of some 1,000 mosques and several dozen Islamic schools.

In June 2004, deputies at the State Duma rejected a bill that would criminalize "Wahhabism" and other "extremist" activities because, among other things, the term "Wahhabi" was said to be too broad a category and not defined well enough to include in law. Disagreement between the heads of the two main Muslim spiritual boards continued, with their separate supporters leveling accusations of Wahhabism, and the Government exploiting this disagreement for political purposes.

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities, and they are barred from conducting services and other religious activities unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices have opened without registering or have been accredited to a registered religious organization.

A 2002 "Law on Foreigners," which transferred much of the responsibility for visa affairs from the MFA to the MVD, appeared to disrupt the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers. Immediately after implementation of this law, nontraditional groups reported problems receiving long-term visas, although the number of such problems appeared to decrease during the reporting period. The FSB inserts itself into matters dealing with visas and religion, particularly where groups it views as "dangerous cults and sects" are concerned, distinctions that it reserves for some of these nontraditional groups. For example, an FSB representative, who acted as the official delegate at a June 2004 Organization for Security and Cooperation

in Europe meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic, and anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes, presented an official statement that labeled Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas as examples of xenophobic cults that propagated "fanatical devotion and rejection of other religions" on their websites. The websites that were listed as evidence, however, proved to be non-existent.

Working groups within the Government continued to focus on introducing possible amendments to the controversial 1997 law. Duma Deputy Aleksandr Chuyev is one of several officials who have proposed legislative changes to formally grant special status to "traditional" religious denominations.

Prior to July 2004, a representative from the federal MOJ reported that investigations into the activities of more than 2,000 religious groups had been conducted, leading to 1,900 notifications of various violations. In addition, the MOJ representative reported that 246 petitions were sent to courts requesting the dissolution of religious organizations, and reported that more than 4,000 monuments and more than 15,000 museum exhibits were returned to the ROC.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities maintained consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and to monitor application of the 1997 law. At the national level, groups interact with a special governmental commission on religion, which includes representatives from law enforcement bodies and government ministries. On broader policy questions, religious groups continue to deal with the Presidential Administration through a body known as the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Organizations. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academics who are specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of traditional and major nontraditional faiths.

Representatives of minority religions have expressed the view that some government officials, particularly in the security services, believe that minority religions—especially Muslims, but also Roman Catholics, some Protestant denominations and other groups—constitute security threats that require greater monitoring and possibly greater control.

In 2004, Smolensk and Kursk Oblast authorities adopted laws restricting missionary activity. The Kursk law was based on a 2001 law that was passed in neighboring Belgorod. Under these laws, foreigners visiting the region are forbidden to engage in missionary activity or to preach unless specifically allowed to do so according to their visas. In 2001, the Belgorod Oblast court ruled to strike the article of the law that stated that groups receiving repeated violations would be banned, and there have been no reports of a reversal of the court's decision. Despite passage of the Belgorod, Smolensk, and Kursk laws, there were no reports of enforcement.

Contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, provide regional officials with opportunities to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Many observers attribute discriminatory practices at the local level to the greater susceptibility of local governments than the federal government to discriminatory attitudes and lobbying by local majority religious groups. There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in the public discussion of their religious views, but usually these instances were resolved quickly. Although President Putin's expressed desire for greater centralization of power and strengthening of the rule of law initially led to some improvements in religious freedom in the regions, as local laws were brought into conformity with federal laws, many localities appear to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the Federal Government chooses to intervene, it works through the Procuracy, MOJ, Presidential Administration, and the courts to force regions to comply with federal law or not, depending on the political stakes, as with the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses and Salvation Army cases. The Government only occasionally intervenes to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

The legal code includes strong hate-crime laws. An anti-extremism bill was adopted in 2003 with the goal of reducing religious and ethnic intolerance and limiting the activities of ultra-right-wing organizations. The legislation prohibits advocating in public speech the superiority of any group based on religion, race, nationality, language, or other attributes; however, the law does not restrict websites that contain such speech. Some observers expressed particular concern about the effect of the legislation on religious freedom. Indeed, in 2003, authorities in Samara made use of the anti-extremism legislation to cancel the registration of a Buddhist community and the Church of the Last Covenant, and to refuse registration to communities of Scientologists and the Unification Church.

The Unification Church reported that the requirements of a broad range of government agencies, involving fire inspection, tax inspection, and even epidemiological inspection, unduly complicated the registration process.

Anti-Semitic statements have been legally prosecuted. While the Government has publicly denounced nationalist ideology and supports legal action against anti-Semitic acts, the reluctance of some lower-level officials to call such acts anything other than “hooliganism” remains problematic. There have been multiple cases of anti-Semitic statements from government authorities in some of the country’s regions, specifically in Krasnodar Kray and Kursk Oblast.

President Putin met regularly during the reporting period with Rabbi Berl Lazar, one of two chief rabbis. In a March meeting, President Putin pledged to make the fight against anti-Semitism a Government priority, and in an October 2004 meeting, he expressed support for the revival of Jewish communities. He also denounced anti-Semitism in several press interviews, usually to foreign media or while traveling outside the country. In April, Rabbi Lazar met with Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov to discuss anti-Semitism and the state of Moscow’s Jewish community. Luzhkov expressed concern about the growing number of extremist organizations and pledged the city’s cooperation in fighting extremism. In 2003, President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov each met with major foreign Jewish organization leaders. In April, President Putin became the first Russian or Soviet President ever to visit the State of Israel.

In March 2004, prominent Rabbis Berl Lazar and Pinchas Goldschmidt came together to call on the Government to better define the meaning of “extremism.” Lazar and Goldschmidt said that law enforcers were prone to dismiss anti-Semitic actions as simple hooliganism to avoid calling attention to their region as extremist-oriented and/or to consciously protect extremist groups with which they sympathized.

Anti-Semitic sentiments have also been expressed by members of the State Duma and other prominent figures. On January 24, some 500 persons, including 19 members of the Duma representing the Rodina bloc and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), wrote to the Prosecutor General asking that he conduct an investigation of Jewish organizations and to initiate proceedings to ban them. The letter charged that a Russian translation of a compilation of ancient Jewish law, the *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh*, incited hatred against non-Jews; the letter accused Jews, among other things, of ritual murders. The MFA condemned the letter on January 25, as did President Putin in remarks delivered in Krakow on January 27, where he was attending ceremonies marking the liberation of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. On February 4, the Duma passed a resolution condemning the January 24 letter. In an apparent response, some 5,000 persons, reportedly including a number of ROC clerics and some prominent cultural figures, signed a similar anti-Semitic letter sent to the Prosecutor General on March 21. A Moscow district prosecutor opened an investigation into the Jewish organization that published the translation, as well as into charges brought by Jewish and human rights organizations that the letters violated federal laws against ethnic incitement, but closed both investigations on June 10 without bringing charges. Later in June, for unknown reasons, the Moscow city prosecutor ordered the district prosecutor to reopen the investigation into the Jewish organization. After an international outcry, the prosecutor closed the investigation again on June 29.

Originally registered with well-known neo-Nazis on its electoral list, the Rodina bloc attempted to improve its image by rejecting openly neo-Nazi candidates; however, it allowed others known for their anti-Semitic views to remain.

State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the LDPR are also known for their anti-Semitic rhetoric and statements. In earlier years, LDPR supporters rallied during Moscow’s May Day celebration, carrying anti-Semitic signs and speaking out against what they called “world Zionism,” but there were no reports of this in 2005.

Some members of the KPRF also made anti-Semitic statements. For example, Krasnodar Kray Senator Nikolai Kondratenko blamed Zionism and Jews in general for many of the country’s problems and blamed Soviet Jews for helping to destroy the Soviet Union, according to a 2003 article in “*Volgogradskaya Tribuna*,” and again in a June/July 2004 conference in Beirut.

There have been multiple cases of anti-Semitic statements from government authorities in some regions, specifically in Krasnodar Kray and Kursk Oblast, as well as in the State Duma.

In March 2004, then Minister for Nationalities Vladimir Zorin brought extremism to the forefront of public attention by calling anti-Semitism and xenophobia major threats to the country. Zorin called for stricter enforcement of the existing statutes outlawing extremism, such as Article 282 of the Criminal Code (which criminalizes the incitement of ethnic hatred). He also called for more programs to educate the public about anti-Semitism and to promote tolerance. In addition, Minister of Internal Affairs Rashid Nurgaliyev became the first high-level government official to acknowledge the existence of right-wing extremist youth groups. Combating this extremism was one of the top priority tasks for the MVD and FSB, he said. These state-

ments marked a positive step toward the Government's willingness to prosecute those who commit hate crimes, although few concrete moves have been made to solve many high-profile cases.

The Government does not require religious instruction in schools but it continues to allow public usage of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. The Government has backed off from a controversial proposal to introduce an optional course on the national level, "Foundations of Orthodox Culture," using a textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, which included descriptions of some minority religions that they found objectionable. Although still used by some schools, the Ministry of Education rejected funding for another edition and further circulation. Nevertheless, a significant number of regions continue to offer a course on Orthodoxy in public schools; for example, on February 15, the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast Ministry of Education announced that the course would be taught in up to 100 schools in that region beginning in the fall. Some regions have published their own textbooks, for use in public school religion classes, which include disparaging comments about "non-traditional" religions. For example, the textbook "A History of Orthodox Culture in Smolensk," recommended for use in public schools by the Smolensk Oblast Department of Education and Youth Policy, included pejorative references to Protestants.

There were no further developments with respect to Education Minister Andrey Fursenko's plan to introduce nationally a new school subject entitled "History of Religion," which would teach the history of all religions. As no final decision has been reached, the issue continues to be left to individual regions, some of which have begun offering such a class.

The Constitution mandates the availability of alternative military service to those who refuse to bear arms for religious or other reasons of conscience. The law on alternative civil service took effect in January 2004, and two supplements to the law were issued in March 2004. The first supplement listed 722 organizations to which draftees may be assigned for the alternative service, and the second listed 283 activities that draftees were permitted to perform. In June 2004, Prime Minister Fradkov signed regulations on the implementation of the law on alternative civilian service. According to the regulations, the standard alternative service term is 42 months—versus the regular service term of 24 months—but the term will be shortened to 36 months if the draftee is assigned to a military organization. The required service for university graduates is 21 and 18 months in these situations. Some human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service for draftees requesting alternative assignments (1.75 times longer than regular military service) acts as a punishment for those who choose to exercise their religious or moral convictions.

The authorities permit Orthodox chapels and priests on army bases. They give some Protestant groups access to military facilities on a more limited basis; however, Islamic services are largely banned, and Muslim conscripts generally are not given time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Muslim recruits serving in the army report being subjected to insults and abuse on the basis of religion.

The office of Federal Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin contains a department dedicated to religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints from individuals and groups about infringements of religious freedom. Some human rights groups, such as Soldiers' Mothers, expressed their satisfaction with Lukin's early performance on the job. Others, such as Memorial, expressed concern about June 2004 reports that Lukin and the MVD agreed to assign a Ministry representative to all human rights organizations. A Moscow Bureau of Human Rights (MBHR) official noted that while Lukin's reports on human rights violations were professional and detailed, his apparent loyalty to the Putin administration compromised his independence.

Avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities also exist. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential District Representatives (Polpreds) include sub-offices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations; however, it is at these administrative levels that religious minorities often encounter the greatest problems.

The Russian Academy of State Service works with religious freedom advocates, such as the SCLJ, to train regional and municipal officials in properly implementing the 1997 law. The academy opens many of its conferences to international audiences.

In June 2004, the federally targeted program on tolerance and anti-extremism was closed ahead of its original 2005 end date. The program called for a large number of interagency measures, such as the review of federal and regional legislation

on extremism, mandatory training for public officials to promote ethnic and religious tolerance, and new materials for use in public educational institutions. Presidential Human Rights Commission Chair Ella Pamfilova expressed shock over the decision to terminate the tolerance program and called it “political nearsightedness.” A representative involved with the program remarked that the implications of the program’s early cancellation were still unclear, but that several Government leaders have continued to express interest in attending tolerance conferences organized by a group that sponsors the program.

Since 1993, officials have encouraged a revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia with state subsidies for building Buddhist temples and training monks. After denying at least three previous visa requests—apparently in order to avoid offending China—in November 2004, the Government granted the Dalai Lama a visa.

In 2003, President Putin stated publicly that secular authorities would do everything in their power to improve relations between the ROC and the Vatican. Later that year, Putin met with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, a move that both sides viewed as a positive step toward improved understanding between the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches. However, the ROC continues to complain vociferously about the Roman Catholic presence in traditionally non-Catholic areas. On June 22, Roman Catholic Cardinal Walter Kaspar, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, traveled to the country to discuss interchurch relations with Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who also serves as the president of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of Foreign Ecclesiastical Relations. Their discussions focused principally on the status of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church.

Foreign religious and other workers have been deterred or prohibited from entering war zones in the North Caucasus, and information about religious activity in the area therefore is less available and reliable than for other regions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Critics continue to identify several aspects of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience as providing a basis for actions that restrict religious freedom. In particular, they criticize the provisions allowing the Government to ban religious organizations, requiring organizations to reregister and establishing procedures for their dissolution. Critics also cite provisions that not only limit the rights of religious “groups,” but also require that religious groups exist for 15 years before they can qualify for “organization” status. Although the situation is somewhat better for groups that were registered before 1997, new groups are hindered in their ability to practice their faith. The federal government has attempted to apply the 1997 law in a liberal fashion, and critics direct most of their allegations of restrictive practices at local officials. Implementation of the 1997 law varies widely, depending on the attitude of local offices of the MOJ (responsible for registration, dissolution, and bans).

In February 2004, the Procuracy of Moscow’s Northern Circuit banned the local organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses on the grounds that it was a “threat to society,” a basis for banning under the 1997 law. Unlike dissolution, which involves only the loss of juridical status, a ban prohibits all of the activities of a religious community. In June 2004, a ban on all organized activity by Moscow’s 10,000 members of Jehovah’s Witnesses took effect, marking one of the first times that such a ban has been implemented under the 1997 law. Jehovah’s Witnesses appealed the ruling, and although the judge admitted that members did not incite violent religious hatred, he did accuse the organization of “forcing families to disintegrate, violating the equal rights of parents in the upbringing of their children, violating the Constitution and freedom of conscience, encouraging suicide, and inciting citizens to refuse both military and alternative service.” On May 31, the Witnesses were advised by telephone that a subsequent appeal, to the Presidium of the Moscow City Court, had been dismissed, although as of the end of the reporting period, they had not received official documentation of the dismissal or an explanation of its grounds. The ban, although applying only to Moscow, has set a precedent for the 133,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses practicing in the country, creating nationwide ramifications for the Witnesses.

After the 2004 decisions to ban the group in Moscow, many local congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout the country reported that rental contracts on their buildings had been cancelled, or appeared to be at increased risk of cancellation. In June 2004, in Sochi, Jehovah’s Witnesses were denied access to a meeting venue after the FSB pressured the landlord; the decision to deny access was later reversed and the meeting took place. In Moscow Oblast, which is a separate jurisdiction from the city of Moscow, the Witnesses reported the cancellation of rentals by a hotel conference center, a cinema and a cultural center, each of which previously had been used by congregations of Witnesses.

Some landlords outside of the city of Moscow appeared to believe that they were obligated by law under the Moscow ban to cancel rental contracts with the Witnesses, as seen by incidents in Roshchino (Leningrad Oblast), Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Khabarovsk and Ufa. For example, on March 24, under pressure from his superiors, the Director of the Palace of Culture in the village of Roshchino forced a group of Witnesses to change the venue of a religious celebration that had been scheduled to take place in the palace. In November 2004, the Witnesses reported that the East Administrative Circuit Police Department in Moscow had ordered the cancellation of a series of conventions scheduled for the Universal Sports and Performance Complex. Religious assemblies held by Jehovah's Witnesses were also disrupted or prevented in Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Khabarovsk, and Ufa in the period covered by this report. In 2004, in Krasnoyarsk, the Jehovah's Witnesses managed to rent facilities only with assistance from a local expert on religious issues.

In some cases the Witnesses reported that authorities consulted with the Russian Orthodox Church to determine whether to approve their requests. The Witnesses report that Father Valeriy of the Archangelsk Orthodox Eparchy exerted pressure on Archangelsk authorities to prevent the Witnesses from holding a district convention scheduled for August, similar to the Church's influence in Vladimir in 2004, in which venue use depended on approval from a local Russian Orthodox priest. The authorities in Stavropol Kray have not permitted Jehovah's Witnesses to rent appropriate facilities for their district conventions since 2003, when officials cancelled a convention on alleged security grounds, and obstructed another convention to be conducted in sign language for 700 hearing-impaired persons. The Jehovah's Witnesses filed a claim against the police for the disruption of this event, but the trial and appeals courts held against the Witnesses.

On April 7, the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk City Court dismissed the claim filed by the city prosecutor to declare invalid the registration of the local Witnesses' organization's title to the unfinished Kingdom Hall in that city. The Witnesses subsequently finished construction of the building and are now able to use it for religious services, although they must still complete their registration of the finished structure and of their right to the land on which it is built. A local Russian Orthodox priest, Fr. Oleg Stenyayev, previously had suggested that the building be confiscated and given to local Muslims, a suggestion to which Vice Governor Georgiy Karlov responded favorably.

In other instances, the Witnesses have succeeded in appeals to overturn dissolution orders issued by lower courts. In November 2004, the Primorskiy Kray Court overturned an October dissolution order issued by a lower court against the Witnesses' organization in the city of Luchegorsk. In October 2004, the Supreme Court of Tatarstan overturned a September ruling by a court in Naberezhniye Chelnye dissolving the Witnesses' organization in that city.

In March 2004, the Bashkortostan Supreme Court upheld a previous ruling against the local Scientologists' Dianetics Center after local authorities accused it of conducting illegal medical and educational activities and of "harming people;" the Center denied conducting any medical activities. In May 2004, the Civil Law Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation upheld the decision of the Bashkortostan Court. To date, the Ufa center has not been dissolved, but it has been forced to suspend all activities and to leave its premises. The Scientologists have formed a parallel Dianetics group in Ufa, but the negative publicity associated with its predecessor and an ongoing investigation by the local prosecutor have hindered its activities. The group leads "a semi-underground" existence.

Following the Supreme Court's 2003 decision to uphold a lower court's dissolution order, the Faith in Action Bible College in Vladivostok ceased operations. The college had been accused of conducting religious education without a license, though lawyers for the school argued that conducting religious education did not require a license as long as the school did not issue diplomas or certificates.

There has been no progress in the investigation of the January 2004 explosion in a building belonging to a congregation of unregistered Baptists (also called "Initsiativniki") in Tula. The authorities have long been suspicious of the Initsiativniki, whose complete refusal to cooperate with the Soviet authorities led to their split in 1961 from the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. The Tula Baptist community believed the explosion was a terrorist act, as community members had been receiving threats from unknown persons. Although local law enforcement authorities attributed the explosion to a natural gas leak, the local gas company reportedly found no gas residue at the site.

Jehovah's Witnesses cited five child custody cases in which courts have reportedly discriminated against their religion. A court in Primorskiy Kray cited the Moscow ban in reversing a lower court's decision to award custody of a child to its mother, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses. In August 2004, the judge in a child custody case

reportedly wrote to the Moscow court that ordered the banning of the Witnesses to request a copy of its decision. In November 2004, the father in a child custody case referred to the Moscow banning decision as one of the factors supporting his claim for custody. The Dagestan custody case initiated in 2002 and mentioned in last year's report is still pending, contrary to our report last year. Some cases were resolved in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses mother. See the Improvements section.

Human rights groups and religious minorities have criticized the Procurator General for encouraging legal action against some minority religions and for giving an imprimatur of authority to materials that are biased against Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, the LDS Church, and others. The FSB, the Procurator, and other agencies have conducted campaigns of harassment against Muslims, Roman Catholics, some Protestant groups, and newer religious movements. Religious groups and organizations faced investigations for purported criminal activity and violations of tax laws, landlords were pressured to renege on contracts, and in some cases the security services are thought to have influenced the MOJ to reject registration applications.

The LDS Church in the Far East has not reported visits by law enforcement officials during this reporting period, in contrast with the previous reporting period.

Forum 18 reported that the FSB had summoned the leadership of the Old Believers on the eve of their church leadership election in February 2004 to indicate the FSB's preference for a particular candidate who ultimately was not elected. There were no reports of further FSB contact with the group.

As reported in 2003, law enforcement personnel monitored some Muslim groups in Sverdlovsk Oblast, particularly focusing on their statements regarding the conflict in Chechnya. No update on the monitoring was available at the close of the reporting period.

Some religious personnel experienced visa and customs difficulties while entering or leaving the country, although such problems appeared to be decreasing for some groups. Authorities either deported or denied entry to several religious workers with valid visas during the period covered by this report. During the last reporting period, the Forum 18 news service reported that there were over 30 cases of foreign religious workers of various faiths who had been barred since the mid-1990s.

In March the Government denied entry to high-ranking British and Danish Salvation Army officials, Major Robert Garrard and Colonel Karl Lydholm, who sought to attend a church congress. In explaining its decision to deny entry, the Moscow city branch of the federal MVD cited the provision of law under which foreigners may be denied entry "in the interests of state security."

Visa problems appeared to decrease for some but not all groups during the reporting period. Several groups, including the LDS and Catholic churches, reported that most of their clergy were issued one-year visas. Foreign religious workers without residency permits typically must go abroad once a year to renew their visas, usually back to their countries of origin; some receive multiple-entry visas or are able to extend their stays. Since the enactment of a Law on Foreigners and subsequent amendments that took effect in 2002, some religious workers reported difficulty in obtaining visas with terms longer than three months (even if they had previously held visas with one-year validity). The curtailed validity has led some religious groups to begin shuttling their missionaries in and out of the country every three months, presenting a financial, psychological, and spiritual hardship for such groups. Missionaries under such restrictions must pay for travel back to their countries of origin, often not knowing if they may return. As a result, many missionary groups must find and maintain two workers for every position if one is to be available for ministry while the other is outside the country applying for a visa renewal.

Although there were no reported expulsions of Roman Catholic priests during the reporting period, there was a report of one foreign priest whose visa was not renewed. Also, Father Jerzy Steckiewicz, leader of the parish in Kaliningrad, was granted a tourist visa valid only for that region, rather than a religious visa, making it impossible for him to travel to other parts of the country. Otherwise, Catholic authorities reported a decrease in visa problems for Catholic priests during the period covered by this report.

Other Catholic sources indicate that most of the priests expelled in previous years, including Bishop Jerzy Mazur and Fathers Wisniewski, Mackiewicz, Stefano Caprio, and Krajnak, have been assigned to parishes outside the country and are no longer seeking visas to return. Unlike in past reporting periods, the Catholic Church reported no difficulties obtaining visas for clergy traveling to Krasnodar Kray.

The LDS Church reported few problems in the reporting period in securing visas for their foreign missionaries and reported that virtually all of their foreign missionaries have received one-year, multiple-entry visas.

There were few reports of religious workers of minority faiths having difficulties registering their visas with the local authorities, as required by law. In the fall of 2002, Khabarovsk authorities attempted to deport two LDS missionaries for failing to register their visas, but the missionaries successfully appealed an unfavorable court decision and were able to complete their mission.

The LDS Church encountered some difficulties in securing residency permits for missionaries, but noted the difficulties varied from region to region and did not constitute a systemic problem. Authorities have never officially claimed that LDS Church missionaries practiced proselytism.

As of the end of the reporting period, Dan Pollard of the Vanino Baptist Church in Khabarovsk Krai had not been allowed to return to the country even though a judge in Khabarovsk issued an order in 2002 clearing him of any obstacles to entering the country. According to him, the Vanino church has been permitted to invite foreigners, but the invitation to him was denied.

In December 2003, the Unification Church reported that it appealed to the ECHR the Government's 2002 denial of a visa to church member Patrick Nolan. This case has not yet been ruled on. In 2003, Nolan lost both a trial court case and an appeal before the Supreme Court.

Missionaries with the Swedish Evangelical Church in Krasnodar, the OMS Christian organization, the Christian Church in Kostroma, and the Kostroma "Family of God" Pentecostal Church, who were denied visas in past years, did not return during the reporting period. In some cases, they were denied visa renewals after living there for up to nine years.

While most conscripts looking for exemptions from military service sought medical or student exemptions, the courts provided relief to some on the grounds of religious conviction. The question of conscientious objector status arose most frequently with respect to Jehovah's Witnesses, who submitted an update on May 24. As of that date, under the new legal regime governing alternative civilian service, 249 Witnesses had been recognized as conscientious objectors and deemed eligible for alternative civilian service. Approximately 36 Witnesses were denied alternative civilian service, in some cases because their applications allegedly were not filed in time. According to the Jehovah's Witnesses organization, 47 criminal cases were initiated against members who claimed conscientious objector status, generally after a finding that the draftee's religious convictions were not genuine: 2 of the defendants were acquitted, 14 were convicted and 31 cases were still pending. The convictions have resulted in either a fine or community service. Approximately 53 Witnesses had filed civil claims against the decision to assign them to unsuitable alternate service. Two such claims have been upheld, 23 have been rejected, and 28 remain under consideration. Of the 249 Witnesses whose requests to perform alternative civilian service have been granted under the new legislation, 122 have not been able to perform it, as such service turned out to be either military-related, or for other reasons, such as unreasonably low wages or failure to provide adequate accommodation. Some of these have been offered different assignments in accordance with their religious convictions, but for others, their refusal to perform civilian service has been interpreted as draft evasion, a criminal offense.

Under the former legal regime governing alternative civilian service, which expired on January 1, 2004, members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported 40 court cases where conscripts defended their right not to serve in the military. Out of these 40 cases, 11 were adjudicated in favor of the objector, 6 against, and 23 cases were still ongoing. One refusal of exemption, in Bashkortostan, for Marsel Faizov, was upheld by the Supreme Court based upon a criminal conviction of the appellant. Criminal cases were brought against four Witnesses unsuccessfully seeking permission to perform alternative civilian service. Two of them were convicted of evasion of military service under Article 328(1) of the Criminal Code, one was acquitted and one case remains pending.

Some religious groups reported problems with religious properties. On March 21, a St. Petersburg court dismissed the Witnesses' suit seeking permission to remodel a building it owned on Garkavogo Street for use as a prayer center. The Witnesses had been litigating the matter since 1999 and now have no option other than selling the property and seeking an alternative site for their prayer center. A public meeting was held in Velikiy Novgorod in July 2004 to discuss the Jehovah's Witnesses application for permission to acquire land in the city on which to construct a lecture hall. Although members of the public present at the meeting responded favorably to the Witnesses' request, the city administration denied the Witnesses permission to acquire land. On April 20, the city administration informed the Witnesses that its denial was not subject to review. Following a March 2004 referendum in Sosnovy Bor (Leningrad Oblast), local authorities refused to let a Jehovah's Witnesses community use land to construct a place of worship. In the referendum, 90 percent of

participants voted against the construction based on the reported referendum wording “What would you prefer to see built on this plot of land, a medical complex or a prayer house of Jehovah’s Witnesses?” Since the referendum, the Witnesses have been searching in vain to find a site on which to build their prayer center.

In Khabarovsk, the regional Business Arbitration Court declared illegal the regional Ministry of Justice’s 2003 registration of a private company as owner of a building that the local Jehovah’s Witnesses community had already purchased. The Court also declared illegal the attempted covert sale of the building to the private company. The building is now a fully functional Kingdom Hall.

According to a May 2 article in the Perm newspaper *Permskiy Obozrevatel*, in late 2004, the Pentecostal New Testament Church in Perm purchased the local House of Culture from a private company to house its social and charitable activities. The purchase provoked considerable controversy in the community, reportedly fomented in part by the local ROC prelate, Bishop Irinarkh, a long-time critic of Pentecostals. Perm Mayor Arkadiy Kamenev threatened to initiate court proceedings to invalidate the purchase.

Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities. A Moscow Baptist community has been unable to rent premises at a public library since 2003.

Contrary to previous reports, the Voronezh Lutheran Community reported no problems conducting religious services during the reporting period. The Lutherans have been discussing with local ROC representatives the return of their church building, although it is expected that this process will take considerable time to complete. Religious news sources reported that Orthodox churches not belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate, including the True Orthodox, have sometimes been prevented from obtaining or maintaining buildings for worship.

The only Hare Krishna temple in Moscow, which was located in property slated for redevelopment, has been demolished, and the situation with the construction of a new temple has not been resolved. According to the Moscow Veda Cultural Center, in January 2004, Mayor Luzhkov signed a decree allocating land in northwest Moscow for construction of the first Veda temple in the country. According to city officials, as of the end of the reporting period, a plan for the design of the temple had been approved by the city, but questions regarding the legal ownership of the property still had to be resolved, due to recent changes in Moscow’s property law; Orthodox groups have opposed the project. Members of the group, which is related to the Moscow Krishna Community, alleged that local officials were intentionally delaying the process. The community sought but was refused assistance from the Russian Inter-religious Council, an NGO composed of representatives of the four “traditional” religions; the Council’s Executive Secretary called the Krishnas a “degrading sect.” Interfax reported that the Inter-religious Council denounced an August 2004 campaign in which the Hare Krishnas gave vegetarian food to veterans and the homeless. Moscow authorities have not provided the Center with temporary facilities, but the Center has been successfully renting space in Moscow and the Moscow Oblast for gatherings and religious services.

According to press reports, in September 2004, representatives of the Aleksandr Nevsky Patriotic Society sought to disrupt a pre-approved demonstration organized by Hare Krishna members in Saratov, held in memory of the victims of the terrorist attack in Beslan.

The Unification Church reported difficulties in establishing a Eurasian Church Center in Moscow to coordinate church activities in the region. The church planned to construct the center on property owned by an NGO affiliated with the Reverend Moon. On April 28, a local prosecutor ordered church officials to turn over for inspection documents relating to the property after the local administration received complaints from local citizens that a “totalitarian sect” was using the building. Eight police officers reportedly visited the property the next day in order to “investigate criminal activity.” As of the end of the reporting period, there were no further developments in this matter; the police paid no further visits to the church, and the prosecutor did not contact the church again.

Citizens in Kaliningrad protested against the construction of a mosque, which the local Muslim community has been requesting since 1993. The ROC was involved in the talks to allow construction. While he claimed not to be against the mosque’s construction, the local Bishop insisted that a small mosque rather than a large Muslim cultural center should be built in the suburbs, proportional to the small number of Muslims living in Kaliningrad. The Muslim community has been unsuccessful in negotiating an agreement with the local authorities. The Sova Center, a human rights NGO, reported in 2004 that Vladimir city authorities obliged the local Muslim community Mahallya to stop construction of a mosque due to violations of city construction regulations. The mosque was being constructed on private land near a house

that was bought by community members and used as a temporary prayer house. City authorities filed suit in the Vladimir Arbitral Court demanding that the unauthorized building be demolished. Local Imam Rusham Myazitov called the local authorities' demands unjustified and noted that the land and building were private property. Earlier, the Vladimir Muslim community, numbering over 25,000 members, could not convince local authorities to allot a piece of land for construction of a mosque.

Restitution of religious property seized by the Communist government remained an issue. Many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, have been returned, although all four traditional religions continued to pursue some restitution cases.

The ROC appears to have had greater success reclaiming pre-revolutionary property than other groups, although it still has disputed property claims despite its preferential treatment. The ROC has a number of restitution claims in Yekaterinburg, including what is now the 1905 Square in the city center, where an Orthodox cathedral once stood. The ROC asserts there are still graves of clerics under the square's paving stones. Patriarch Aleksey II asked Moscow Mayor Luzhkov to give the ROC retroactive property tax benefits, which were cut in accordance with the new Tax Code. Accordingly, the Moscow City Duma passed a law in March 2004 returning approximately \$27,500 (approximately 800,000 rubles).

Forum 18 reported that an Old Believer community in Samara was still struggling to obtain restitution of a pre-revolutionary church. Municipal officials told the community that it should first ascertain the position of the ROC on restitution.

The Roman Catholic Community reports 44 disputed properties, most of which were properties used for religious services. The Catholic Church had no success in achieving restitution of the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. The office of an oil company currently occupies the cathedral, and the Catholic parish is meeting in a former disco hall because it does not expect the company to vacate the premises. In Vologda, Catholic authorities have not succeeded in achieving restitution of a pre-revolutionary church that now houses a restaurant.

In 2003, Cossacks in Stavropol protested against the federal authorities' decision to turn a city art gallery back into a mosque because it was located in the center of Stavropol. The Cossacks insisted that the mosque should be built in a different place. First Deputy Stavropol Administration Head Nikolay Zhukov assured the Cossacks and citizens of Stavropol that they had the administration's support. The local Muslim community insists that according to the 1993 law on returning religious property, the building should be returned to their community; however, opponents argue that the building has never been used for religious services and as it is located in the city center, early morning calls to prayer will wake citizens and will create vehicle and foot traffic as well as noise in an urban residential area. According to a March 2004 statement from the Council of Muslim Religious Organizations in Stavropol City, the region's arbitration court finally refused to hear a case set to decide the issue—after seven months of preliminary deliberations—on the grounds that it was “outside its competency.” The local Muslim community was forced to file suit with the court in the first place, explains the statement, because the Stavropol Kray authorities repeatedly refused to acknowledge receipt of a 1999 instruction issued by the federal Ministries of Culture and State Property demanding the return of the former mosque to local Muslims.

Members of the Moscow Buddhist Community “Rinchen Ling” have not yet worked out a deal with Moscow city officials for compensation for their community space, from which they were evicted in 2004 and which was later demolished. The community received the building in 1997 for a 15-year beneficial rent. The community rejected several offers of replacement buildings, which they said were too small or unsuitable to their needs.

The Jewish community is still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The FJC reported that federal officials have been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, as have some regional officials, although some Jews assert that only a small portion of the total properties confiscated under Soviet rule has been returned.

There was no information indicating that officials returned a synagogue that was confiscated in Krasnodar in 1936. A news service reported in 2003 that regional authorities in Krasnodar officially refused to return the synagogue, arguing that there were no alternative locations to house the occupants (a youth radio school). In December 2004, the mayor of Sochi gave the Jewish community a parcel of land on which to construct a synagogue to replace the small structure now in use. Chabad Lubavitch still seeks return of the Schneerson Collection, a revered collection of religious books and documents belonging to the Lubavitcher rebbes. Since 2003 there has been a rabbi in permanent residence in Krasnodar.

Muslims in the Krasnodar Kray continued unsuccessfully to obtain authorization from the mayor's office to build a new mosque in the city of Sochi. Authorities continued to stall a local Muslim organization's plans to construct a new mosque, even though its rented premises barely accommodate the approximately 30 members who attend Friday prayers. According to the Krasnodar Kray's Department for Relations with Public Associations and Religious Organizations and Monitoring of Migration Processes, land can be allocated for the mosque only after a public opinion survey indicates that the proposed location would not cause a "conflict situation."

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On April 14, a group of masked paramilitary troops stormed the Work of Faith Church in Izhevsk, Udmurtia, during an evening worship service. According to reliable reports from multiple sources, the troops led worshippers outside, where they searched them without a search warrant; some of the women were threatened with rape. Forty-six persons were detained, and some were held as long as 24 hours. Udmurtian officials later gave conflicting explanations of the incident, saying that the search was carried out because a suspect who had confessed to a recent murder said he had hidden some of the victim's belongings on the church grounds, and also because of reports that illegal migrants were living in the Work of Faith prayer house. Udmurtian officials alleged that 22 of the 46 persons detained were not properly registered, while church officials stated that only 12 were not properly registered, that these were homeless people or ex-convicts whom the church was sheltering in its social adaptation center, and that it was assisting such people to register with the authorities. The church officials added that the person identified as the murder suspect briefly had lived at the church's social adaptation center one and one-half years earlier but had since disappeared.

In response to a complaint by Rev. Igor Nikitin, President of the Association of Christian Churches of Russia, local authorities conducted an investigation of the Izhevsk incident. In letters to Rev. Nikitin dated May 17 and May 25, the authorities said that there had been no time to get a warrant prior to conducting the search as the courts were already closed for the day, and since the matter was urgent, they conducted the search on the order of the prosecutor, and that a court confirmed the prosecutor's order the following day. They said their investigation uncovered that the police had committed some procedural irregularities while the detainees were in custody, that the district police chief had received a warning because of the irregularities, that two other police officials had been reprimanded, and that a criminal investigation had been opened into the allegation that the police beat one of the detainees. Administrative charges were dropped against most, if not all, of the detainees.

In August 2004, the Khabarovsk newspaper "Amurskiy Meridian" reported that in March of that year, police in Khabarovsk detained and beat Sergey Sofrin, a local Jewish businessman, repeatedly insulting him with religious epithets. As of the end of the reporting period, contacts at the newspaper reported that although an investigation of the incident was conducted, the police involved were not disciplined.

There were no further developments in the case arising out of a 2003 anti-drug demonstration disrupted by city administrators and local police in the town of Liski, Voronezh Oblast, and in which police reportedly beat protesters. Two evangelical pastors, Andrey Bashmakov and Grigory Protsenko, organized the demonstration.

According to the Sova Center, a human rights NGO, nine female students were arrested during their reading of the Qur'an in a classroom at Kabardino-Balkariya State University. They used to meet several times a week for the reading. When arrested, the students were told that wearing hijab and group studying of the Qur'an violated university statutes, and that they would have to explain their behavior at militia headquarters. When they were brought to Nalchik city militia headquarters #2, they were reportedly searched and interrogated in a group and separately and detained for about eight hours. Although the students believed that it was an act of intimidation, they did not intend to file a lawsuit. The same source claimed that some Muslims in Moscow mosques had been detained prior to the March 2004 elections.

Authorities periodically arrested suspected members of the banned Islamic political movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), on the grounds that they conducted extremist and terrorist activities. According to the Sova Center, police broke up an HT cell in Chelyabinsk in March, and detained one of its members. Sova also reported that since December 2004, the authorities in Tatarstan initiated criminal cases on charges of extremism and terrorism against 11 members of radical organizations, including HT and Islamic Jamaat. Court hearings began in January in Nizhnevartovsk in the case of an HT member charged under Article 282-2 (participation in activities of an extremist organization) and Article 205-1 (involving third

persons in committing a crime of a terrorist nature) of the Russian Criminal Code. In December 2004, police in Izhevsk detained two individuals accused of distributing leaflets on behalf of HT. The trial started on May 4. In Tobolsk, Tyumen Oblast, proceedings in the case of nine HT suspects opened on February 15, but the Tobolsk City Court sent the case back to the regional prosecutor's office, asking it to specify more precisely the charges against the defendants. On May 24, the press reported that the prosecutor had complied with the court's request and that a new trial date would be announced in June. The Sova Center reported that the Tobolsk City Court resumed the HT hearing on June 20 behind closed doors. At the end of the reporting period, the witnesses were being questioned.

There were occasional reports of short-term detentions on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries for brief periods throughout the country, or asked them to cease their activities, such as displaying signboards, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing. The Jehovah's Witnesses in particular reported a number of incidents in which its members were assaulted by other citizens or briefly detained by authorities while conducting lawful preaching activities. In August and September 2004, Moscow police reportedly detained eight Jehovah's Witnesses in three incidents.

On May 30, Moscow police detained ten congregants and supporters of the Emmanuel Pentecostal Church after breaking up a demonstration in front of City Hall. The Pentecostals were protesting discrimination against their denomination and, in particular, the alleged failure of city authorities to allocate a parcel of land on which they could construct a Pentecostal church. They assert that they had been trying to get permission to construct a church in Moscow since 1996 and that officials in one district of Moscow forbade them from building on a plot of land that the city had allocated for that purpose, and that officials in another district prevented them from renovating a building that the congregation had purchased for a church.

Members and supporters of the Emmanuel Church continued holding demonstrations virtually on a daily basis through the end of the reporting period. Demonstrators were arrested during at least two additional protests in early June. They asserted that their demonstrations were legal, as they had filed the requisite advance notice with city authorities. City authorities contended that the demonstrations were illegal, asserting that the city had responded to the protesters' advance notice by advising them to hold their protest at an alternate site. The protesters said they never received the city's response. Several protestors, including Emmanuel Church Pastor Aleksandr Purshaga, were charged with holding an illegal demonstration and sentenced to five-day jail terms.

In September 2004, an Initiativniki prayer house in Lyubuchany, Chekhov District, Moscow Oblast, burned down. This followed by several weeks efforts by security agencies, including local police and FSB officers, to intimidate participants in an open air gathering sponsored by the Lyubuchany church for several thousand Initiativniki from all over the central region. Press reports claimed that eyewitnesses placed some of the same law enforcement personnel at the church site minutes before the fire broke out. Although the official investigation attributed the fire to arson, no one has been charged in the incident. According to Forum 18, the building owner's requests for permission to rebuild went unanswered by local authorities. When the Baptists proceeded to start rebuilding anyway, local authorities filed suit to prevent it. Hearings scheduled on February 2 and April 19, on the local government's action were postponed, the latter one indefinitely, because local authorities failed to send a representative to court. As of mid-May, reconstruction of the church was nearly complete. The Baptists held several youth meetings in Chekhov in April and May that proceeded without interference by the authorities.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Izvestiya reported that on May 17, 2005, the Moscow city government decided to create a two-year, \$12.5 million (350 million ruble) program to promote interethnic tolerance.

As discussed in Section IV, federal and regional officials participated actively in, and in many cases strongly supported, a range of NGO-organized programs—many sponsored by the U.S. Government—to promote tolerance and the more effective handling of hate crimes.

The Jewish community has undergone a major institutional revival since the fall of the Soviet Union. In the past five years, the number of organized Jewish communities in the country has increased from 87 to over 200. During the reporting period, new synagogues were dedicated in Birobidzhan (Jewish Autonomous Oblast), Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg; and a Jewish school was opened in Kazan. The support of federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. Work began on the construction of a \$100 million complex, on land donated by the Moscow city government, that will house Jewish community institutions including a school, a hospital, and a major new museum devoted to the history of the country's Jews, the Holocaust, and tolerance.

During the reporting period, Volgograd's Voroshilovskiy District Prosecutor's office decided not to pursue a criminal case against the editor of the newspaper "Kolokol," accused of inciting ethnic hatred through a series of anti-Semitic articles. The MBHR had sought such a case, and the Volgograd Jewish community previously had appealed to city authorities for action on numerous occasions, without any follow-up. The prosecutor reportedly found that the statute of limitations had applied to one of the offending articles, making it too old to be prosecuted under the law and that the others did not meet sufficient cause of action under the hate crime laws.

Pursuant to a June 2004 decision by the Arbitration Court of Sverdlovsk Oblast, an anti-Semitic newspaper, "Russkaya Obshchina Yekaterinburga," closed down. According to Jewish leaders, there is no longer any anti-Semitic newspaper in the region, although the former editor-in-chief of the banned newspaper continues to play an active role in the region's Russian National Cultural Autonomy, an openly anti-Semitic organization.

Press reports in August indicate that the St. Petersburg Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Community has had its church returned; it had been confiscated by Soviet authorities in 1922.

Some minority groups were able to obtain restitution of their religious property. During the reporting period, a synagogue in Vladivostok and school buildings in Rostov-on-Don and Orenburg were returned to the Jewish community. In 2003, city authorities in Orel returned a synagogue to the Jewish community after years of petitions. There were no additional reports of problems concerning the property during the period covered by this report. The Buryat leaders of the traditional Buddhist Sangha (Organization) continue to occupy the oldest Buddhist temple in Europe, after having won back rights to the building from a private company in an earlier lawsuit.

In March 2004, Tula City Duma Deputies returned a church to the local Catholic community. The church was officially given to the Tula Catholic community in 1994, but the building was occupied by a forensic medical practice until 2003.

The delayed construction of the Roman Catholic Church in Pskov resumed in 2003 and the authorities have been cooperative. The exterior of the church has been completed and work is underway to complete the interior, with the church's consecration scheduled for 2007. Local authorities had delayed construction apparently due to ROC pressure.

In July 2004, the new Magadan Cathedral was consecrated and is in use. During the previous reporting period, it had been left unconsecrated in symbolic recognition of Bishop Jerzy Mazur's absence, despite the arrival of the new Bishop, Kirill Klimovich.

After being repeatedly denied a visa for many years, the Dalai Lama received one and visited Kalmykia for three days in November–December 2004, where he consecrated a Buddhist temple and led religious services. Although a request has been passed to the Government, permission still has not been received for him to make a visit to Tuva.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that six cases were resolved recently in favor of members of the group who sought custody of their children; one was at the close of 2003, and five were in 2004 (three during the reporting period).

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religious matters are not a source of pronounced societal tension or overt discrimination for most citizens; however, many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the ROC is at the heart of the national identity. Instances

of terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya have given rise to negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it is often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices are the primary motivation. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and other minority religions, and some ROC leaders expressed similar views.

There is no large-scale movement to promote interfaith dialogue; however, some religious groups successfully collaborate on the local level on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialogues. Pentecostal and Baptist organizations, as well as the ROC, have been reluctant to support ecumenism. At the international level, the ROC has traditionally pursued interfaith dialogue with other Christian groups; however, the ROC criticized the Vatican's 2002 decision to upgrade its four apostolic administrations to dioceses. Individuals associated with Russian Orthodox and Muslim hierarchies made numerous hostile statements opposing the decision and continued to consider it a source of tension. On June 8, Patriarch Aleksey II sent a statement to the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance meeting in Cordoba, Spain, in which, reportedly for the first time, he referred to anti-Semitism as a "sin."

The ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity (RNE) paramilitary organization continued to propagate hostility toward Jews and non-Orthodox Christians. The RNE appears to have lost political influence in some regions since its peak in 1998, but the organization maintained high levels of activity in other regions, such as Voronezh.

According to an FJC report published on June 2, a court in Velikiy Novgorod convicted three RNE members of inciting ethnic and religious hatred. The leader of the RNE cell was sentenced to four years in prison and the two others received sentences of two and three years. According to the Sova Center, on April 26, two RNE members from Bryansk Oblast were convicted and given suspended sentences on charges of inciting racial hatred after distributing RNE leaflets and videos in Orel. After the verdict was announced, RNE activities in Orel noticeably intensified.

A splinter group of the RNE called "Russian Rebirth" registered successfully in the past in Tver and Nizhniy Novgorod as a social organization, prompting protests from human rights groups; however, in several regions such as Moscow and Kareliya, the authorities have limited the activities of the RNE by denying registration to their local affiliates. Despite losing its registration as a political party, the National Sovereign Party of Russia (NDPR) is still active. At a small, February 28, rally in Moscow, members distributed anti-Semitic publications and engaged in anti-Semitic hate speech. In March, a local prosecutor in Kamchatka initiated proceedings against a member of the party accused of distributing anti-Semitic leaflets. In 2004, NDPR activists distributed their newspaper, "Russian Front" in downtown Kostroma along with leaflets reading "Russia, liberate yourself from (ethnic slur) fascism."

The number of underground nationalist extremist organizations (as distinguished from such quasi-public groups as the RNE) appears to be growing. According to the MVD, neo-fascist movements have approximately 15,000 to 20,000 members, of which over 5,000 are estimated to live in Moscow. The Moscow Human Rights Bureau (MHBR) estimated the number of skinheads in the country at 50,000. Such groups exist in approximately 85 towns in the country. St. Petersburg is believed to have the largest number, an estimated 10,000–15,000, while Moscow is believed to have approximately 5,000–5,500. According to the MHBR, other cities with significant numbers of skinheads include Kaliningrad (approximately 1,000), Nizhniy Novgorod (between 600 and 2,500), and Rostov-on-Don (approximately 1,500). The primary targets of skinheads were foreigners and individuals from the North Caucasus, but they expressed anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments as well. Typically, skinheads form loosely organized groups of 10 to 15 persons, and, while these groups do not usually belong to any larger organized structure, they tend to communicate through the hundreds of fascist journals and magazines that exist throughout the country, and increasingly on the Internet.

Hostility toward non-Russian Orthodox religious groups sparked harassment and occasionally physical attacks. The police investigation of the June 2004 killing of Nikolai Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism, had not yet produced any suspects by the end of the reporting period. Shortly after Girenko was shot in his St. Petersburg apartment, a death threat appeared on the website of the nationalist group "Russian Republic." The group took responsibility for the killing; however, some experts believe the real killer may be one of the violent extremists incarcerated as a result of Girenko's testimony. Girenko had served for many years

as an expert witness in trials involving alleged skinheads and neo-Nazis. He was also involved in a program to promote religious and ethnic tolerance whose funding the Government recently canceled.

In connection with the April 2004 attack in Voronezh on human rights activist and anti-Semitism monitor Aleksey Kozlov, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that two young skinheads were arrested. The crime was treated as a misdemeanor and the nature of the punishment was unknown.

Muslims, the largest religious minority, continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas. Discrimination persists largely because of ethnic nationalism among certain portions of the population, which is aggravated by the ongoing conflict in Chechnya and the terrorist acts it has prompted. The September 2004 school seizure in predominantly Russian Orthodox Beslan, North Ossetia, by terrorists believed associated with Islamic extremists, raised inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions in the region, but the expected backlash against the neighboring, predominantly Muslim, republic of Ingushetiya did not come to pass. Muslims have claimed that citizens in certain regions fear Muslims, citing cases such as a dispute in Kolomna, approximately 60 miles southeast of Moscow, over the proposed construction of a mosque.

Government officials, journalists, and the public have been quick to label Muslim organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Such sentiment has led to a formal ban on Wahhabism in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkariya. NGOs in the country have noted that, especially after the events in Beslan, discrimination against Muslims has persisted without any intervention from the state authorities. Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers are generally harmonious. In Tatarstan, the authorities promote the liberal brand of Islamic thought dubbed "Euro-Islam;" however, tensions occasionally emerge in the republic and the surrounding Volga region. Law enforcement organizations closely watch Muslim groups. Officials often describe Muslim charitable organizations as providing aid to extremists in addition to their overt charitable work. Extremist versions of Islam, such as Wahhabism or Salafism, are often associated with terrorism and radical Muslim fighters in the North Caucasus.

Although the last reporting period saw the chairman of the Council of Muftis, the head of the Central Spiritual Board of the country's Muslims, and the head of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus, jointly denounce terrorism, the national press has carried stories during the reporting period highlighting their public differences in attitudes toward Wahabbism, among other things.

On January 22, 10 tombs were desecrated in the Donskoye Muslim cemetery in Moscow. Two days later, militia detained two teenagers suspected of committing this act of vandalism. The investigators characterized the crime as "mere hooliganism" rather than a hate crime, and the suspects were not charged because of their age. No new desecrations were reported in Yekaterinburg or Sverdlovsk Oblast since the May 2004 desecration of two cemeteries there. No investigation results have been reported in those cases. In February, 26 tombs were desecrated in a Muslim cemetery in Yoshkar-Oly; witnesses claim to have seen 40 teenagers in the cemetery area. In 2003, a mosque in Bratsk, Irkutsk Region, was set on fire, and while regional authorities promised aid to the local Muslim community, it had not yet been provided, nor have the arsonists been found. Also in 2003, a Muslim cemetery in Chelyabinsk was desecrated and swastikas were painted on several tombstones, and a mosque in Usole-Sibirsk was firebombed during a worship service. No one was injured in the attack. No new information was available on the case at the end of the period covered by this report.

The "Tauba" mosque in Nizhniy Novgorod continued to be a target for vandals' attacks. On January 25, swastikas were again painted on the mosque walls; it has been vandalized on repeated occasions. A local Islamic website said that Muslims might abandon the mosque out of fear of attack by neo-Nazis. The local Muslim Spiritual Administration has repeatedly appealed to local authorities to guard the mosque, but no measures have been taken. According to the Presidential Representative to the Volga Federal District, such acts of vandalism should be viewed as simple displays of a low level of culture, rather than national and religious extremism.

According to a local journalist, on several occasions, militiamen barred women wearing the hijab from Yekaterinburg's subway stations.

While many in the Jewish community claim that conditions for Jews have improved in recent history, primarily because there is no longer any official "state-sponsored" anti-Semitism and because the Jewish community has undergone a major institutional revival, anti-Semitic incidents against individuals and institutions continue to occur and violence is used with increasing frequency compared with the previous reporting period. Although the number of attacks on Jews and

Jewish institutions remained relatively constant until late 2004, the Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC) reported an increase in late 2004 and the first months of 2005. The MBHR reported a total of 38 anti-Semitic incidents in the first quarter of 2005, compared with a quarterly average of 31 in 2004, a 22 percent increase. According to the MBHR, Moscow recorded the most anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, with 27, followed by Volgograd, Voronezh, Kaliningrad and Petrozavodsk, each with 5. The ADL reported that anti-Semitic incidents appeared to have become more violent in recent months. Crimes were mostly committed by young skinhead groups, whose numbers have increased from only a few dozen in 1992 to over 50,000 today. Anti-Semitic statements have sometimes been prosecuted.

Several hate crimes were reported against individual Jews in the Moscow Oblast during the reporting period. In December 2004, three young persons stabbed and seriously wounded a Jew who was riding on a tram in central Moscow, in what the MBHR characterized as a hate crime. The police detained three suspects but soon released two of them, who were later rearrested after a complaint by relatives of the victim. The MBHR reported that on January 1, a Jew was seriously beaten in a downtown Moscow metro station, in another apparent hate crime. On the evening of January 18, in two separate incidents that occurred 15 minutes apart, several Orthodox Jews were attacked by a group of skinheads while walking in the vicinity of Marina Roscha Synagogue. One of the victims was hospitalized for his injuries. The police arrested two suspects and charged them with hooliganism aggravated by racial hatred; they were convicted of disorderly conduct and inflicting bodily injuries and sentenced to four- and two-year sentences. The judge found there was not sufficient evidence to recognize racial hatred as an aggravating circumstance. After this incident, and at the request of Jewish leaders, Moscow authorities increased the police presence in the vicinity of Marina Roscha Synagogue, and no further incidents have been reported in the area.

Many Jewish cemeteries were desecrated during the reporting period, in Kazan, Moscow, Saratov, Petrozavodsk, Makhachkala, Irkutsk, and St. Petersburg. The Jewish cemetery in Petrozavodsk was vandalized at least three times in 2004; a criminal investigation failed to identify the perpetrators. In late May, 2005, swastikas were painted on 26 Jewish tombstones in the Jewish section of Kazan's Arskoye Cemetery. The FJC reported that the authorities are investigating the incident as a hate crime and the Kazan City Council issued a statement condemning the attack. On May 14, Jewish graves at the Vostryakovskoye Cemetery, near Moscow, were desecrated. According to the FJC, law enforcement launched a criminal investigation and is treating the case as a hate crime, rather than simple hooliganism. Probably the most large-scale desecration occurred in St. Petersburg in December 2004, when 40 to 100 graves at the St. Petersburg Preobrazhenskoye (Jewish) Cemetery were vandalized. Unidentified perpetrators painted swastikas and Nazi signs on the gravestones. Nazi signs were also found on the cemetery's small synagogue. In the aftermath of the desecration, St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko met with the city's Chief Rabbi, Menachem-Mendel Pevsner, and promised a serious investigation of the crime; she later called him to inform him that the perpetrators had been arrested and the case would go to court. Matviyenko told Pevsner she considered religious tolerance to be an important issue and that she wanted to raise awareness in this regard. As of the end of the reporting period, no further information was available about the case.

In January, a court in Velikiy Novgorod sentenced Yuriy Novikov to a 3-year prison term for having planted a fake explosive device near the city's synagogue in 2003. In the case of the March 2004 cemetery desecration in Kaluga Kray, four teenagers and two adults suspected in the vandalism were detained. In November 2004, three of the individuals, including one minor, were sentenced to two years' probation. The other participants were too young to be prosecuted.

Several synagogues and Jewish community centers were vandalized during the reporting period. On May 10, a fire which authorities considered a case of arson destroyed the historic synagogue of Malakhovka in the outskirts of Moscow. Several days earlier, there had been a burglary at the synagogue. The FJC reported that the same persons were suspected of both crimes and raised the possibility that the synagogue fire may have been set to destroy evidence related to the burglary, rather than as a hate crime. Nazi posters reportedly appeared in Petrozavodsk on April 20, the anniversary of Hitler's birthday, and two students were arrested five days later. The Jewish community center in the Moscow suburb of Saltykovka was hit by arson on January 1 and February 19. The ADL reported that the prosecutors are still investigating the cases. The synagogue in the Perovo district of Moscow was vandalized in January and again on February 15. In October 2004, a group of skinheads tried to enter the synagogue in Penza, but were stopped by congregants. A group of approximately 40 people armed with chains and iron clubs approached

the synagogue later that day. The parishioners locked themselves inside and called the police. The ADL reported that the police detained two or three of the perpetrators and forced them to repair the damage they did to the synagogue.

There were no developments in the April 2004 cases of the beating of Ulyanovsk Jewish youth leader Aleksandr Golynsky and the vandalism by skinheads of the Ulyanovsk Jewish Center. The FJC reported that although suspects had been detained by community members and delivered to the police, they were later released. There also were no developments in connection with the 2003 attacks on the synagogues in Kostroma and Yaroslavl or the 2004 attack on the synagogue in Chelyabinsk.

A number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers that include anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim and xenophobic articles, many of which violate the law against extremism, are readily available throughout the country. Nevertheless, the production of this material continues, and the publishers are rarely prosecuted. For example, an anti-Semitic novel, "The Nameless Beast," by Yevgeny Chebalin, has been on sale in the State Duma's bookstore since September 2003. The xenophobic and anti-Semitic text makes offensive comparisons of Jews and non-Russians. According to the ADL, books sold in the Duma are not typically monitored for content. In cases where Jewish or other public organizations have attempted to take legal action against the publishers, the courts have been generally unwilling to recognize the presence of anti-Semitic content.

The estimated number of xenophobic publications exceeds 100; many of them are sponsored by local chapters of the NDPR. The larger anti-Semitic publications, such as "Russkaya Pravda," "Vitaz," and "Peresvet," are easily available in many Moscow metro stations. Some NGOs claimed that many of these publications are owned or managed by the same local authorities that refuse to take action against offenders. In addition, there are at least 80 websites in the country dedicated to distributing anti-Semitic propaganda.

On April 7, "Velikolukskaya Pravda," a newspaper supported by the authorities in Velikiy Luki in Pskov Oblast, published an anti-Semitic article which the local prosecutor has begun investigating as a possible hate crime. Other examples of anti-Semitic hate speech included the painting of anti-Semitic graffiti on a synagogue in Samara on March 8, on Jewish community centers in Syktyvkar (Komi Republic) and Petrozavodsk in March, and on a synagogue in Perovo, Moscow Oblast, on February 15. In October 2004, anti-Semitic graffiti was found on the walls of buildings in Baltiisk, Kaliningrad Oblast, and in the city of Kaliningrad. In November 2004, on the anniversary of Kristallnacht, anti-Semitic graffiti was found on the headquarters of the Moscow-based "Holocaust Foundation." The newspapers "Rus Pravoslavnaya" and "Za Russkoye Delo" published articles supporting the January 24, anti-Semitic appeal signed by 20 Duma deputies.

According to local representatives of the ADL, a St. Petersburg prosecutor initiated criminal proceedings against the publisher of the "Our Fatherland" newspaper, accusing it of hate speech.

In January, there were preliminary hearings arising out of the Article 282 criminal case initiated in Ulyanovsk in 2002 against the editor of the local newspaper "Orthodox Simbirsk," who ran a number of articles demonizing Jews. The FJC reported that the editor of the paper was fired, although the ADL noted that on March 14, Governor Morozov of Ulyanovsk promised to provide this paper governmental financial support in order to keep the paper from going bankrupt. In December 2004, a court in Novosibirsk convicted and sentenced the editor of "Russkaya Sibir," Igor Kolodezenko, to a two and one-half year suspended sentence for publishing anti-Semitic articles. Kolodezenko had been convicted of inciting ethnic hatred in 2000, but never served prison time, having been subject to the amnesty issued by the Duma on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of the end of WWII.

Other non-Orthodox groups were also subject to attacks and harassment. No suspect has been identified in the 2003 attack on Pyatigorsk Catholic priest Steven Rogers. The local branch of the FSB joined the criminal investigation started by the local police department. According to Catholic authorities, Rogers continues to work in Pyatigorsk and has not experienced further problems. In October 2003, a Catholic cemetery was desecrated in Perm, and the authorities listed Satanists as the main suspects.

Tensions between the ROC and the Vatican continued during the reporting period, despite President Putin's visit to the Vatican in 2003. In addition to tensions over the Vatican's 2002 decision to upgrade its administrative units to dioceses, other issues of concern between the two groups include the possibility that the Holy See could recognize an Eastern-rite Ukrainian Catholic Patriarchate in Kiev, the ROC's continued negative perception that Roman Catholics proselytize across the country, and a proposal by a local priest to open a small, three-room Catholic con-

vent whose main mission would be to work with orphans in the city of Nizhniy Novgorod. In February 2004, the Nizhniy Novgorod Diocese of the ROC said this decision was considered by the ROC as an “a priori” unfriendly move. The Nizhniy Novgorod Catholic parish insisted that the convent devoted to the Carmelite order was not going to perform missionary activities; however, the ROC argued that the Carmelite Order is known as the Catholic Church’s most active missionary order. As of the end of the reporting period, Catholic sources asserted that the church never intended to and did not open a full-fledged convent in Nizhny Novgorod and that the controversy had been caused by a misunderstanding.

In February 2004, Roman Catholic Cardinal Walter Kaspar, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, met with Aleksey II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and Kirill, Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, who is the president of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of Foreign Ecclesiastical Relations, to engage in dialogue. During Kaspar’s visit, Patriarch Aleksey told the press that the establishment of an Eastern rite Patriarchate in Kiev would ruin Orthodox-Catholic relations for decades. ROC leaders continue to publicly accuse Roman Catholics of coercing the Orthodox faithful into the Catholic Church, and in particular, of baptizing Orthodox orphans. As a result of Kaspar’s visit, the two churches agreed to establish a joint working group, which met in May and September 2004, to consider some of the specific concerns of the two sides. Representatives of both churches reported that the working group contributed to an improved atmosphere. In an August 2004 gesture of reconciliation, Pope John Paul II returned to Patriarch Aleksey a treasured 18th-century copy of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan. The icon was taken from the country under unclear circumstances during communist times. A Catholic group purchased it and donated it to the Vatican in 1993. In May, Metropolitan Kirill met with newly-elected Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican, and the two leaders highlighted their commitment to working cooperatively.

Reports of the harassment of evangelicals and Pentecostals increased during the reporting period. According to the testimony of Boris Perchatkin of the American-Russian Relief Center at the April 14 Helsinki Commission hearing, during the reporting period, churches and prayer houses were vandalized or burned in Nekrasovskoye, Chelyabinsk, Bratsk, Izhevsk, Buryatiya, Oshkar Ola, Khalsk, and Podolsk. The October 2004 fire at the Pentecostal church in Podolsk represented the second time that church was attacked in 2004. Few, if any, of these crimes were prosecuted. The Sova Center reported on December 22, 2004 that the Pentecostal New Generation prayer house in Nekrasovskoe, Yaroslavl Oblast, was damaged by arson and robbed. No arrests were reported.

African ministers of non-Orthodox Christian churches have experienced prejudicial treatment, based apparently on a combination of religious and racial bigotry. One African-born Pentecostal pastor who was beaten and whose church building was burned in 2001 disbanded his congregation in 2003 due to continued threats and harassment.

According to the SCLJ, on April 30, the eve of Russian Orthodox Easter, a Baptist church in Chelyabinsk was firebombed. Local Baptists blame pejorative coverage in a news broadcast on a local television channel for fomenting anti-Baptist sentiment by characterizing the Baptists as a “totalitarian sect.” According to church sources, after the fire, employees of the television station visited the church to apologize, saying they did not expect their report to have this effect. The station broadcast a retraction, saying that footage of a Baptist church service erroneously had been included in a report on “totalitarian sects” and that the Baptists were not such a sect. A press conference called by the pastor of the church and the local Baptist bishop received sympathetic coverage on all the local television channels.

There has been no progress in the investigation of the January 2004 explosion in a building belonging to a congregation of unregistered Baptists (“Initsiativniki”) in Tula. The authorities have long been suspicious of the Initsiativniki, whose complete refusal to cooperate with the Soviet authorities led to their split in 1961 from the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. The Tula Baptist community believed the explosion was a terrorist act, as community members had been receiving threats from unknown persons. Although local law enforcement authorities attributed the explosion to a natural gas leak, the local gas company reportedly found no gas residue at the site.

In Yekaterinburg, members of Pravoslavnoye Bratstvo (Orthodox Brotherhood), a youth group founded by the missionary department of Yekaterinburg’s Russian Orthodox Diocese, continued to picket Sunday services at Protestant churches, as they have for much of the last six years. The Orthodox Brotherhood picketers have been joined recently by members of City Without Drugs, a foundation which media reports have linked to the Uralmash organized crime group. The picketers distributed

leaflets describing Protestant churches as “dangerous, totalitarian sects,” and accused members of these churches of torturing and even killing children. Picketers beat some members of Protestant congregations, following them after church services. The Orthodox Archbishop of Yekaterinburg accused local Protestant groups of engaging in “espionage disguised as religious activities.” In April, at the request of Protestant leaders, Yekaterinburg city officials began denying permission to groups who wished to picket outside Protestant churches. Local Protestants reported improvement in the situation since the ban on picketing, however, a June 16 report from the Interfax Ural news service stated that the Yekaterinburg Orthodox diocese asked the city to lift this ban on picketing.

On March 23, a group of anti-Evangelical activists tried to hold an open-air rally outside a school in Yekaterinburg, to demand that city authorities evict the New Life Church from its building. When the rally’s organizer was unable to show police a permit to hold an outdoor demonstration, a scuffle ensued and the organizer and his companions were detained. They were released shortly afterwards and the police officer and prosecutor involved in their detention were fired, with police officials subsequently apologizing to Yekaterinburg’s ROC Archbishop Vikentiy for the organizer’s arrest. Duma Deputy and former City without Drugs leader Yevgeniy Roitman asserted to the press that the New Life Church had bribed the police to detain the rally organizer. Roitman, Yekaterinburg City Duma Deputy and current head of City without Drugs Andrey Kabanov, and others participated in a March 27 picket in front of the New Life Church.

LDS Church leaders confirmed press reports that in August 2004, a local Cossack group organized a protest against plans for the construction of a meetinghouse in Saratov city. Muslim and ROC leaders also spoke out against the construction. Although the church had received construction permits for the project, the city stopped construction, and has not permitted it to resume.

Members of Jehovah’s Witnesses are still referred to routinely in the press as a religious “sect,” although they have been present in the country for approximately 100 years. In November 2004, the Committee for the Salvation of Youth from Totalitarian Sects filed a claim with the Prosecutor General seeking the dissolution of the Administrative Center of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia. According to the Witnesses, other persons and entities have sent similar letters and complaints to the Federation Council and the Prosecutor General. A common prejudice circulating among the general public is that members of Jehovah’s Witnesses are “spies of imperialism.” In January 2004, the governor of Stavropol Kray compared members of Jehovah’s Witnesses to Wahhabis. This comparison resonated particularly strongly in Stavropol, an area that has been attacked by Chechen separatists.

During the reporting period, the Jehovah’s Witnesses reported at least three incidents in Moscow and St. Petersburg alone in which residents attacked Witnesses while they were preaching in apartment buildings; the authorities did not take any action against the assailants. According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the management of a Yekaterinburg stadium in which a Jehovah’s Witnesses convention was being held interrupted the convention, forcing thousands of participants to leave the stadium. A Kingdom Hall was picketed in Stavropol in December 2004. In 2003, a meeting of 15,000 members of Jehovah’s Witnesses in St. Petersburg was almost disrupted when police initially refused to provide protection against “anti-cult” activists who protested the event. In response to a request for help, police tried to cancel the event, claiming the group lacked documentation, but ultimately permitted it to take place.

After nearly 2 years of criminal proceedings, Sakharov Center Director Yuriy Samodurov and staff member Lyudmila Vesolovskaya were found guilty on March 28, of inciting religious hatred and were fined approximately \$3,750 (100,000 rubles) each. The two convictions were under appeal as of the end of the reporting period. The third defendant, artist Anna Mikhailchuk, was acquitted of all charges. The charges stemmed from a provocative 2003 exhibit of religious-themed art entitled “Danger, Religion!” which roused the ire of the ROC and was defaced by vandals claiming the exhibit offended their beliefs. Many human rights activists welcomed the relatively light sentence. Nonetheless, the verdict set a troubling precedent, leaving room for the state and the ROC to define parameters for religious and artistic expression. Those who vandalized the exhibit were never charged with a crime. Agence France Presse reported in March that Samodurov sued the vandals, who were found not liable.

The SCLJ and evangelical leaders asserted that opponents of “nontraditional” religions in the Government and in majority faiths increasingly used the mass media, conferences and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religions. According to the SCLJ, on May 10–11, the Saratov diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, Saratov State University, and the regional government organized a con-

ference entitled “Neo-Pentecostal Sects in Russia: A Threat of Religious Extremism.” The conference’s final document characterized neo-Pentecostal sects as being dangerous for the physical and spiritual health of individuals and for national security. Speakers associated with the ROC took part in antisect conferences and meetings around the country.

In June 2004, the Izhevsk newspaper “Infopanorama” published an article that slandered the pastor of that city’s Work of Faith Evangelical Church. After the SCLJ’s intervention, the newspaper published an apology. In an ongoing case arising out of articles published in 2003 in the Yeysk (Krasnodar Kray) newspaper Priazovskiye Stepi, the journalist who wrote the articles reportedly testified that local Seventh-day Adventists used a Bible written with human blood and covered with human skin. As of the end of the reporting period, this case was ongoing. According to the SCLJ, the Krasnodar Kray Prosecutor General refused to initiate a criminal investigation, as requested by the Adventists, into a local television station which broadcast the allegation that the local Adventist congregation conducted a number of ritual murders each year.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, a number of religious groups, NGOs, and others in a steady dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok were active throughout the period in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom. U.S. Government officials engaged a broad range of officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis. In the period covered by this report, such contacts included government officials, representatives of all traditional and many nontraditional religious confessions, the SCLJ, the Esther Legal Information Center, the Anti-Defamation League, lawyers representing religious groups, journalists, academics, and human rights activists known for their commitment to religious freedom.

The Embassy and consulates have worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs designed to sensitize law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. Senior Embassy officials discussed religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the Presidential Administration and the Government, including the MFA, raising specific cases of concern. Federal officials have responded by investigating some of those cases and by keeping Embassy staff informed on issues they have raised. As part of continuing efforts to monitor the overall climate of religious tolerance, the Embassy and consulates maintained frequent contact with working-level officials at the MOJ, Presidential Administration, and MFA.

The Embassy addresses religious freedom by maintaining a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities. Two positions in the Embassy’s political section are dedicated to human rights and religious freedom issues. These officers work closely with other U.S. officers in Moscow and other U.S. Consulates around the country.

Consular officers routinely assist American citizens involved in criminal, customs, and immigration cases; these officers are sensitive to any indications that these cases involve possible violations of religious freedom. Such issues are raised regularly in meetings with the Consular Department of the MFA and with the MVD. As American missionaries and religious workers comprise a significant component of the local American citizen population, the Embassy conducts a vigorous outreach program aimed specifically at this population in order to provide consular services and to maintain contact for emergency planning purposes. In the course of this outreach program, Embassy officers inquire about the missionaries’ experiences vis-à-vis immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He attended events on major religious holidays and often met with a range of religious leaders from various denominations. He hosted discussions on religious freedom with the leaders of major religious denominations and hosted a Passover Seder for local contacts.

The U.S. Government presses for the country’s adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the Department of State met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about religious freedom, as well as with visiting representatives of local religious organiza-

tions, the Esther Legal Information Center, the SCLJ, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering local religious organizations.

On April 14, members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission held a hearing in Washington on the treatment of minority religious groups in the country. Several members of Congress made statements urging the Government to respect human rights and religious freedom. Witnesses testified about patterns of abuse toward religious minorities and restrictions on religious freedom, especially Protestants and Muslims, the latter due to registration requirements and suspicion of Muslims as terrorists.

Members of the staffs of the Consulate Generals in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok and Yekaterinburg met with religious leaders from a range of denominations in several cities in their consular district. During the reporting period, the U.S. Consulate General in Yekaterinburg maintained a particularly active outreach program to the Muslim community of the Urals. The Consul General in Yekaterinburg hosted Iftars for Muslim contacts in three cities in the Urals to celebrate Ramadan, and Consulate officials visited numerous mosques and madrassahs within the consular district. Two American speakers on Islamic issues visited six major Ural cities, and an exhibit featuring mosque architecture in the U.S. was displayed in seven cities, with the Ambassador hosting the exhibit's opening in Tyumen.

In June–July 2004, the Embassy and Consulate General Yekaterinburg coordinated and funded a 3-week summer camp for 70 children from the predominantly Muslim city of Ufa, Bashkortostan. The summer camps promoted English language skills, leadership skills, an understanding of American culture, as well as inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding among the predominantly Muslim children. Based on the success of this model, four more camps are scheduled for summer 2005, two in Ufa and two in Kazan; one of the camp sessions in each city is planned to begin in June, the other in July.

The U.S. Government has funded translation and publication of several important books by U.S. authors and the Embassy distributed 29 sets of over 100 books on democracy, freedom of expression, tolerance, and human rights.

The U.S. Government organized exchanges under the International Visitor program with a focus on religious freedom issues. In September 2004, the Consulate General in Yekaterinburg sent a group of 10 primarily Muslim community and religious leaders from the Urals to the United States on a program entitled "Promoting Multiculturalism in Civic Life." As a result of this program, one participant, a television producer, devoted an episode of her television show "Islam Today" to religious freedom in the U.S. and, along with another participant, founded the "Interethnic Information Center," which follows media coverage of ethnic and religious minorities and works to educate journalists and government officials on tolerance issues.

In March, the Consulate General in Yekaterinburg supported an academic conference on ethnic and religious tolerance at Orenburg State University. The conference drew participants from throughout the country and Kazakhstan. The Mufti of Orenburg Oblast and the head of the Orthodox Church in Orenburg both participated in the conference.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy's Democracy Commission, a small (up to \$24,000—approximately 672,000 rubles) grants program supporting local NGOs working on a range of issues, approved 9 tolerance-related grants totaling approximately \$79,000 (approximately 2,212,000 rubles).

In 2004–05, the U.S. continued to support through a grant the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal's "Climate of Trust" program, which focuses on forming and strengthening Regional Tolerance Councils in Kazan, Ryazan, and Leningrad Oblast. Ethnic and religious leaders, local government officials, and NGO representatives participated in the Councils. In September 2004, the grantee organized a conference on combating hate crimes in Ryazan for representatives of the Volga Federal District; this followed a 2003 conference for over 100 students and cadets of the Ryazan branch of the Moscow University of the MVD. In May, a similar conference was held in Ryazan for activists of the Stavropol Kray Regional Tolerance Councils. As the result of the program, tolerance courses for militia cadets were introduced in the St. Petersburg Law Institute of General Procuracy and the Ryazan Branch of the Moscow Academy of the MVD. Tatarstan's regional Ministry of Education signed an agreement in which it pledged to include tolerance courses in continuing education programs for school teachers.

The U.S. supported two additional tolerance projects through the PartNER (Partnerships, Networking, Empowerment, and Roll-out) program, which ended in December 2004. One of these projects, the Ural NGO Support Center (UNGOSC), worked to encourage public discussion of ethnic and religious tolerance in Perm by working with 58 media outlets to publicize project activities and conduct a training

program for journalists to promote more responsible media coverage on racial and ethnic issues. Twenty-seven specialists who received training on tolerance issues reached more than 550 teenagers and raised their awareness of interethnic and interreligious issues. In December 2004, UNGOSC staged a weekend camp in Perm for 20 teenagers who represented different ethnic and religious communities. Over the life of the project, UNGOSC worked with over 200 organizations to publicize program activities, recruit training participants and stage public awareness campaigns and seminars. UNGOSC and its American partner organization Legacy International designed and published 2,500 brochures and posters that were disseminated during public awareness campaigns.

The other tolerance project supported under the PartNER program was conducted at the Volga Humanitarian-Theological Institute in Nizhniy Novgorod, which provided representatives of government and religious organizations with a series of seminars to educate participants and help them focus their thoughts and ideas on religious policy issues. The activity of religious communities in the Volga Federal District increased as a result of this project. For example, in Tatarstan, program participants held a conference on the role of religious organizations in social policy. Representatives of various religious communities and government officials took part. The conference aided the religious organizations in uniting their efforts to assist street children, migrants, and other people in difficult situations. Participants also established a website to serve as a virtual resource center for state officials and community leaders. One direct result of the project was further refinement of the proposal to change federal legislation concerning the regulation of religion that was submitted to the Committee on Religion Affairs of the State Duma.

In June–July, U.S. Government grantee Southern Russia Resource Center (SRRC), in partnership with the Tolerance Institute, conducted seminars for 60 participants from North Ossetiya, Chechnya and Ingushetiya, promoting models for how to prevent and address such problems as xenophobia, cultural ignorance and interethnic conflict. Participants included NGO leaders, journalists, youth leaders and regional and local government officials.

SAN MARINO

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 37.57 square miles, and its population is approximately 28,100.

The Government does not provide statistics on the size of religious groups, and there are no recent census data providing information on religious membership; however, it is estimated that more than 95 percent of the population is Catholic. Other religious faiths present include small numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses, Bah'is, Muslims, Jews, and members of the Waldesian Church.

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.

Although Roman Catholicism is dominant, it is not the state religion, and the law prohibits discrimination based on religion. The Catholic Church receives direct benefits from the State through income tax revenues; taxpayers may request that 0.3 percent of their income tax payments be allocated to the Catholic Church or to "other" charities, including two religions (the Waldesian Church and Jehovah's Witnesses).

In 1993, some parliamentarians objected to the traditional 1909 oath of loyalty sworn on the "Holy Gospels." Following this objection, Parliament changed the law in 1993 to permit a choice between the traditional oath and one in which the reference to the Gospels was replaced by "on my honor." In 1999, a European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling implicitly endorsed the revised 1993 legal formulation. The ECHR also noted that the traditional oath still is mandatory for other offices, such as the Captain Regent or a member of the Government; however, by the end of the period of this report, no elected Captain Regent or government member has challenged the validity of the 1909 oath.

There are no private religious schools; the school system is public and is financed by the State. Public schools provide Catholic religious instruction; however, students may choose without penalty not to participate.

Epiphany, Saint Agatha, Easter, Corpus Domini, All Saints' Day, Commemoration of the Dead, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas are national holidays.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Amicable relations exist between the religious communities, and government and religious officials encourage mutual respect for differences.

The country's role protecting religious minorities during World War II, including 100,000 total refugees, about 1,000 percent of the country's regular population then, is a public source of pride for citizens and government officials.

Roman Catholicism is not a state religion but it is dominant in society, as most citizens were born and raised under Catholic principles that form part of their culture. These principles still permeate state institutions symbolically; for example, crucifixes sometimes hang on courtroom or government office walls. The country's dominant Roman Catholic heritage may inform individual choices on lifestyle issues such as marriage or divorce, although there is no government suasion involved.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its policy to promote human rights and has always found the Government fully open to such discussions.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

The Constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and its constituent republics provide for freedom of religion, and state union and republican Governments generally respect this right in practice. There is no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the majority Serbian Orthodox Church receives some preferential consideration.

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

There were some instances of discrimination and acts of societal violence directed against representatives of religious minorities in Serbia and Montenegro. The Jewish community in Serbia reported an increase in anti-Semitism, including anti-Semitic books, during the period covered by this report; however, there were about the same number of incidents against religious groups overall as there were during the previous reporting period. Leaders of minority religious communities often relate acts of vandalism to negative media reporting labeling them "sects." Police and gov-

ernment officials have taken some positive steps in response to acts of hate speech and vandalism.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the state union and republic Governments as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives meet regularly with representatives of ethnic and religious minorities as well as with government representatives to promote respect for religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The state union of Serbia and Montenegro (excluding U.N.-administered Kosovo) has an area of nearly 35,300 square miles and a population of approximately 8,186,000. Religion plays a small but growing role in public life. The predominant faith in the country is Serbian Orthodoxy. Approximately 78 percent of the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro, including most ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins who profess a religion, are Serbian Orthodox. The Muslim faith is the second largest in Serbia and Montenegro, with approximately 5 percent of the population, including Slavic Muslims in the Sandzak, and ethnic Albanians in Montenegro and southern Serbia, and Roma located throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Roman Catholics make up approximately 4 percent of the population and are predominantly Hungarians in Vojvodina, ethnic Albanians in Montenegro, and Croats in Vojvodina and Montenegro. Protestants make up approximately 1 percent of the population and include Adventists, Baptists, Reformed Christians, evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, and Pentecostals. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are also present. Serbia and Montenegro has a small and aging Jewish population numbering less than 4,000. The remainder of the population professes other faiths or considers itself atheist. In a 2002 census, 3 percent of Serbian citizens claimed to be nonbelievers or declined to declare a religion. According to Montenegro's 2003 census, almost 70 percent of its population is Orthodox, 21 percent is Muslim, and 4 percent is Catholic. Approximately 100 foreign missionaries from several Protestant faiths operate in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and its constituent republics provide for freedom of religion, and the Governments generally respect this right in practice. The Governments at all levels generally strive to protect this right in full and do not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the Montenegrin Republic's Constitution mentions the Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community, and Roman Catholic Church by name, stating that these and other religions are separate from the state. The majority Serbian Orthodox Church receives some preferential consideration.

In December 2004, an amendment to the Serbian property tax law removed the blanket exemption for property of religious organizations used for religious services and substituted an exemption covering only the seven "traditional" religious communities: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Muslim community, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Jewish community, the Reform Christian Church, and the Evangelical Christian Church. The Serbian Religion Minister claimed to be unaware of the amendment when a local religious leader asked him about it, and he said he would ask the tax authorities not to begin enforcing the amendment before it could be reconsidered. Tax officials reportedly have not started collecting the tax on formerly exempt religious property.

The Serbian Government began requiring all religious organizations to submit annual financial statements as businesses. On March 2 2005, Novi Sad's commercial court fined Serbia's Baptist Union \$308 (20,000 dinars) and its vice-president, Zarko Djordjevic, \$62 (4,000 dinars) for failure to comply, but suspended the fines because the Baptist Union had been unaware of the requirement. In 2004, the Adventist Church was fined \$395 (500 euros) for the same offense. In 2005, legal proceedings were underway against the Adventist Church and the financial director of the Serbian Orthodox diocese of Raska/Prizren for failure to submit annual financial statements.

The requirement for religious groups to register lapsed when the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), predecessor of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, ceased to exist in 2003. By the end of the period covered by this report, there was no formal registration of religions in either republic. However, to gain the status of a juridical person necessary for real estate and other administrative transactions,

religious groups may register as citizen groups with the Ministry of Interior in their home republic. During the reporting period, the Serbian Government circulated several drafts of a religion law that would provide for registration of religions.

Religious education in Serbian primary and secondary schools continued during the period covered by this report. According to a 2001 Serbian government regulation, students are required either to attend classes from one of the seven “traditional” religious communities or to elect to substitute a class in civic education. The proportion of students registering for religious education grew during the period covered by this report and now equals the proportion registering for civic education courses. Some Protestant leaders and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Serbia and in Montenegro continued to voice their objection to the teaching of religion in public schools, as well as to proposals that would officially classify some of Serbia’s religions as traditional.

There was limited progress in Serbia during the period covered by this report on restitution of previously seized religious property. The Government reported that it was near to completing a register of seized religious property. As a temporary measure, a few religious communities have been granted free use of some facilities that had been seized from them. There was no progress noted in drafting a law on restitution of religious property in Serbia. Montenegro’s Law on Restitution, passed in 2004, covers religious property on the same footing as privately owned property.

The Government of Montenegro built a temporary waste facility on a site in Lovanja in 2004. A claim filed by Catholic priest Don Branko Zbutega that the Catholic Church held title to some of the land was rejected and a countersuit filed against him by the Montenegrin Government was upheld. Zbutega has appealed the \$2510 (2,000 euros) fine imposed on him in the case.

While municipal governments in Serbia at times fund rehabilitation of historical religious property of various faiths, the Serbian Government also is funding construction of one religious building—a large Serbian Orthodox Church—by raising postal charges. After the widespread destruction of the Church’s property in Kosovo in March 2004, the Serbian Government decided to subsidize salaries of Orthodox clergy in Kosovo.

Orthodox Christmas and Orthodox Easter are public holidays in Serbia and Montenegro. These holidays do not negatively affect other religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, there are examples of Serbian municipalities’ suspicion and caution with regard to certain religious groups.

Police response to vandalism and other societal acts against religious groups rarely resulted in arrests, indictments, or other resolution of incidents. One notable exception was action that state union Human and Minority Rights Minister Rasim Ljajic obtained when criminals demanded protection money from Jehovah’s Witnesses.

There is no chaplain service in the armed forces. Although local Serbian Orthodox priests are the only clergy offering religious services at armed forces chapels, members of the armed forces of other faiths can attend religious services outside their barracks and spend important religious holidays with their families. Due to cost considerations, the Army has not yet implemented plans to meet Muslim soldiers’ dietary requirements, which would require separate kitchens.

The Belgrade Islamic community reported continued difficulties in acquiring land and government approval for an Islamic cemetery near the city. Religious organizations generally continued to report difficulty obtaining permission from local authorities in Serbia to build new worship facilities.

The town of Bor, Serbia, forbade distribution of 2,500 gifts donated by the U.S. religious organization Samaritan’s Purse, reportedly at the request of a Serbian Orthodox clergyman; the gifts were subsequently distributed. The mayor of Bor had expressed concern that Baptists and Jehovah’s Witnesses are dangerous.

The town of Leskovac, Serbia, has a municipal Council for the Prevention of Addictions and Religious Sects. The Council has identified Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, the Evangelical Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses and “satanists” as sects and promoted propaganda against them.

The Montenegrin Government challenged a decision by the Ministry of Defense of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to transfer military property to the majority Serbian Orthodox Church in 2003. Montenegrin officials claim the transfer was an illegal attempt to prevent the Republican Government from obtaining this property when the federal state was dissolved and replaced by the state union of Serbia and Montenegro. The case remained unresolved by the end of the period cov-

ered by this report, largely because of a moratorium on most transfers of military property.

The town of Leskovac did not follow through on its offer to provide land, electricity, water, sewage, and a road to facilitate relocation of a tent church used by Protestant evangelical Roma that had been singled out for destruction; however, the town also did not follow through on its plan, approved by the Serbian Supreme Court, to raze the tent church, and there is no indication that it will.

Local authorities ordered the demolition of a Romanian Orthodox church built on private, rural land (which does not require building permits) in the village of Malajnica, Serbia. The authorities evidently acted because the local Serbian Orthodox clergy had not granted approval for the church—an issue of Orthodox Church rules and jurisdiction. The case was before the Serbian Supreme Court at the end of the reporting period. In May 2005, a local Romanian Orthodox priest who led a religious procession without police permission was charged with inciting religious hatred but quickly acquitted.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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; nor were there reports of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

The amount of anti-sect reporting in the media declined slightly during the reporting period.

The Serbian Government has been responsive to concerns expressed by religious organizations and the international community about a draft religion law presented in July 2004. Successive drafts have come closer to addressing concerns about dividing religions into categories with different privileges, such as government financial support, and imposing conditions on registration of religions.

There was widespread criticism of anti-Semitic graffiti in March 2004 by government and democratic political leaders, as well as by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Human and Minority Rights Minister Rasim Ljajic was able to assist the Jehovah's Witnesses when criminals demanded protection money from their Kingdom Hall in Loznica, Serbia, in December 2004. The demand for protection money was never repeated after Minister Ljajic contacted Interior Minister Dragan Jovic about the problem and the latter sought intervention by local police. The perpetrators were not charged for the extortion attempt, but at the end of the reporting period they were on trial for the 2000 killing of a paramilitary commander.

In May 2005, police in Sremska Mitrovica filed a criminal complaint against two minors who allegedly threw rocks at the Adventist Church there, breaking windows and damaging a wooden fixture.

Police have been stationed outside the Belgrade mosque since the attack on it in March 2004. Police also provide security in front of the Belgrade synagogue.

The Government has not become involved in the canonical dispute between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which the Serbian church considers schismatic. For more on this issue, see the report for Macedonia. At its May 2005 Assembly, the Serbian Orthodox Church excommunicated followers of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and asked that Orthodox churches around the world recognize the autonomous status of the Ohrid archdiocese.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

While relations between members of different religious groups were generally good, there were some instances of discrimination against representatives of religious minorities in the country and at least one instance of discrimination against the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Muslim-majority Sandzak region. Religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout the country, and in some cases it was difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin. Harassment of the Romanian Orthodox Church appeared for the first time during the reporting period.

Minority religious communities in Serbia continued to experience problems with vandalism of church buildings, cemeteries, and other religious premises. Most attacks involved spray-painted graffiti; thrown rocks, bricks, or bottles; or vandalized

tombstones. In Serbia, in July 2004, dozens of gravestones were damaged and knocked over in a Catholic graveyard in Sombor. Windows were broken at Baptist and Christian Community Churches, and an entry door and windows were broken at Rainbow (a Christian humanitarian organization) in Novi Sad during the July 31–August 3 weekend. The same weekend, windows were broken at an Adventist church in nearby Kovilje. In August 2004, windows and an entry door were broken at a Romani Christian kindergarten in Jagodina. In October 2004, stones were thrown at a Baptist church in Novi Sad, graffiti (“We’ll burn you,” a swastika, and a three-legged skinhead-style swastika with “KKK”) were spray painted on a Christian Reformed Church in Sombor, windows were broken on the house and car of an Adventist preacher in Novi Sad, a grave was desecrated at a Catholic graveyard in Novi Sad, and graffiti were spray painted on a Catholic church in Kovin. In November 2004, graffiti, including swastikas, were spray painted on a Catholic church in Petrovaradin, and windows were broken on the home of a Christ Spiritual Church priest in Aradac. In December 2004, stones were thrown at a Church of God church in Belgrade, and windows and an entry gate were broken at a Church of God church in Sremska Mitrovica. On January 8, 2005, a window was broken at an Assembly of God church in Pancevo and graffiti (fascist symbols) were spray painted on a memorial to Jewish Holocaust victims in Novi Knjezevac during the nights of January 26–27, 2005 (the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz). On March 1, 2005, graffiti (“death to the sects”) were spray painted on an Assemblies of God church in Pancevo; anti-Semitic graffiti and posters were found in Belgrade on March 22, 2005 (see details below); and graffiti (“death to Adventists,” “sect,” a drawing of an AK-47 and a Serbian nationalist symbol) were spray painted on a Belgrade Adventist facility during the nights of March 27–28, 2005. Finally, on April 4, 2005, windows were broken at an Adventist church in Smederevo, and on April 5, 2005, graffiti (“orthodoxy or death,” “they serve the devil here,” “Jews out,” “gays out of Serbia,” a swastika, and a Serbian nationalist symbol) were spray painted in Zrenjanin on the Jewish community center, an education center, and Adventist church. Local officials quickly painted over graffiti that appeared at the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade and at an Adventist church in Zrenjanin.

While harassment of religious minorities was generally limited to crimes against property and occasional verbal abuse, there were a few physical attacks on persons in Serbia during the reporting period. In October 2004, an Adventist preacher suffered a verbal attack and then was grabbed and shaken in Novi Sad; the attacker’s identity was known, but no charges have been pressed. Also, in October 2004, three youths first verbally attacked a member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses arriving at the Kingdom Hall in Leskovac and then hit his leg with a rock and beat him with their fists, causing minor injuries. Police have identified the attackers, and the injured person and Jehovah’s Witnesses community were preparing private criminal charges. (In Serbia, private individuals can initiate criminal charges.) A member of the Jehovah’s Witnesses was beaten in Novi Pazar because of her religious affiliation. In early 2005, a preteen Muslim boy was verbally abused and then beaten in Belgrade by other youths in his basketball league after they learned he had a Muslim surname. On at least one occasion, a rock was thrown at Serbian Orthodox clergy in the Muslim-majority Sandzak region.

Jewish leaders in Serbia reported a continuing increase in anti-Semitism, including an increase in the quantity of small-circulation anti-Semitic books. The release of new books or reprints of translations of anti-Semitic foreign literature often led to a spike in hate mail and other expressions of anti-Semitism. These same sources associated anti-Semitism with anti-Western and anti-globalization sentiments, as well as with nationalism. Anti-Semitic Internet postings (often translations of foreign websites) also remained a problem. On February 24, 2005, a Nazi website in the United States listed names, phone numbers, and addresses of what it claimed were “prominent Jews” in Serbia.

There was a spike in anti-Semitic graffiti and vandalism before the September/October 2004 local elections, paralleling the spike in incidents against other religious and ethnic minorities at the time.

During the night of March 21–22, 2005, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared, targeting the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade, buildings owned and used by Western-leaning TV/Radio B-92, and two human rights NGOs. In addition, anti-Semitic posters targeting B-92 appeared in several highly visible downtown areas. The posters were signed Nacionalni Stroj (National Formation). The Government quickly painted over the graffiti at the cemetery and arrested three people caught putting up the posters. There was widespread condemnation of the incidents by government and democratic political parties. On March 31, 2005, police arrested another person caught writing graffiti on the wall of the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade.

In March 2005, a tabloid attacked the president of the Serbian Supreme Court because of her “Jewish origin,” and provided her address, a photo of the building where she lives, and her home phone number.

In 2004, police arrested 110 persons for an attack on the Belgrade mosque in March 2004. In April 2005, one of these persons was sentenced to three months’ imprisonment in connection with the attack. A trial of eleven persons indicted in the attack was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The Serbian Government has repaired the outside of the mosque but has not yet repaired the interior. The Government has also pledged funds toward repair of other buildings on the mosque compound.

Because of the failure of defendants to appear, the trial has not yet started for the 11 persons charged in an attack on the mosque in the southern Serbian city of Nis, which occurred the same night as the attack on the Belgrade mosque. Authorities have issued arrest warrants for at least five of the defendants. Nis authorities provided \$4,688 (300,000 dinars) toward repair of the Nis mosque.

Anti-sect propaganda decreased slightly in the Serbian press, which labeled smaller, multiethnic Christian churches—including Baptists, Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses—and some other smaller religious groups “sects” and claimed they were dangerous. Religious leaders have noted that instances of vandalism often occurred soon after press reports on sects. In August 2004, the daily *Politika* published a report from a contributor that attacked Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Jehovah’s Witnesses as “pseudo-Christians.” In September 2004, a guest on BK Television spoke for a half hour against Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses and claimed that they used sports events and language schools to recruit members. In September 2004, local television in Jagodina reported that a “Gypsy Christian Center” was luring children into a sect. The daily *Vecernje Novosti* reported in September 2004, in an article quoting Serbian Orthodox priests, that Zealots (a small Orthodox Christian group) were creating pandemonium and that their temple was for “unclean spirits.” In October 2004, a guest on RTS 1, a government television station, claimed that Jehovah’s Witnesses were worse than satanists. On February 18, the daily *Politika* attacked the Zealots as an “Orthodox sect.” According to some sources, the fact that one of Serbia’s leading experts on sects is a police captain whose works are used in military and police academies further complicates this situation.

In Montenegro, the Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox communities coexist within the same towns and often used the same municipally owned properties to conduct worship services. Tensions continued between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church. These tensions are largely political, stemming from Montenegro’s periodic drive for independence that started in 1997, and appear to be increasing as the prospects for a referendum on independence grow. The two churches continue to contend for adherents and to make conflicting property claims, but this contention was not marked by violence. However, NGO representatives reported concern at the level of nationalism and hate speech in Montenegro. Members of minority religious communities in Montenegro also reported being labeled “sects” and “cults” in the media. In May 2005, after Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan Amfilohije presided at the funeral of the mother of indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic and used the occasion to deny the existence of the Montenegrin state, Amfilohije was criticized by Montenegrin President Vujanovic for improper political interference.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government continues to promote ethnic and religious tolerance throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Embassy officials meet regularly with the leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Government to promote the respect of religious freedom and human rights. Embassy officials worked with the Serbian Religion Minister and leaders of religious communities to improve a draft law on religion. Embassy officials also worked with religious leaders to organize a public interfaith event to help minimize the public perception that certain minor religions are dangerous “sects.” The Embassy also counseled religious groups to report all incidents against their property or adherents to senior government officials, to counter often lackluster response by local police. Embassy officials interceded with local authorities concerning an evangelical tent church that had been singled out for destruction. Embassy officials also sponsored a seminar on the chaplain’s role in the U.S. military. Embassy officials continued to urge senior government officials to speak out against incidents targeting ethnic minorities (including their places of worship and cemeteries) and to find and punish the perpetrators.

KOSOVO

Kosovo continued to be administered under the civil authority of the U.N. Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244. This resolution called for “substantial autonomy and meaningful self-administration” for the persons of Kosovo “within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.” UNMIK and its chief administrator, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), established a civil administration in 1999, following the conclusion of the NATO military campaign that forced the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo. Since that time, the SRSG and UNMIK, with the assistance of the international community, have worked with local leaders to build the institutions and expertise necessary for self-government under UNSCR 1244. UNSCR 1244 also formed an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR) mandated to deter hostilities and establish secure conditions.

The UNMIK-promulgated Constitutional Framework provides for freedom of religion, as does UNMIK Regulation 1999/24 on applicable law in Kosovo; UNMIK and the provisional institutions of self-government (PISG) generally respected this right in practice. The number of attacks by Kosovo Albanians against Kosovo Serbs, which peaked following the NATO campaign in 1999, again rose in March 2004 when violence perpetrated by Kosovo Albanians resulted in the deaths of 19 persons (11 Kosovo Albanians and 8 Kosovo Serbs), 954 injuries, and widespread property damage, including 30 Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries (two of which are listed by UNESCO as cultural heritage sites), cemeteries and more than 900 homes. The number of attacks by Kosovo Albanians against Kosovo Serbs decreased during the period covered by this report.

Respect for religious freedom increased somewhat during the period covered by this report. However, most of the tensions between Kosovo’s Albanians and Serb populations were largely rooted in ethnic, rather than religious, bias. Catholic institutions were not targets. Attacks on Orthodox religious sites significantly decreased after the March 2004 riots.

The events of March 2004 stalled the transfer of responsibility for the protection of Serbian Orthodox churches and other religious symbols from the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) to U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS). The process was in fact halted immediately following the March 2004 riots and KFOR increased the number of checkpoints; however, the transfer process has since continued. Since the riots, Kosovo leaders, with prompting by international groups, sought to address the concerns of persons displaced by the violence and agreed to cooperate with religious site reconstruction.

In March 2005, UNMIK released a follow-up report to its June 2004 “Human Rights Challenges Following the March Riots.” The report declared that KPS needed to become a more effective, accountable and human rights compliant police force. This report supplemented those of various groups analyzing the performance of KFOR, CIVPOL and KPS during the March riots and the future role of each entity. The municipalities of Gjilan/Gnjilane and Decan/Decani (home to the UNESCO world heritage site Decani Monastery) were the first of more than 30 jurisdictions to be transferred to KPS control. However, the Decan monastery requested and received continued heavy presence of Italian KFOR troops on site.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo as part of its overall policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government also supports UNMIK and KFOR in their security and protection arrangements for churches and patrimonial sites. In December 2004, the SRSG and KFOR commander signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) which specifies response mechanisms and cooperation between the KPS and KFOR to maintain order. Contingency plans for riot control have been revised, and now include operational presence in municipalities and permanent contact among local police, UNMIK, communities, village leaders and local authorities.

In January 2005, under a new community policing initiative, UNMIK police began phased deployment of 350 international police officers to 30 locations in the region—sites for potential return of a displaced Serb population and those inhabited by Serbs.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Kosovo has an area of approximately 4,211 square miles and its population is approximately 2 million. Islam is the predominant faith, professed by most of the majority ethnic Albanian population, the Bosniak, Gorani, and Turkish communities, and some in the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian community, although religion is not a significant factor in public life. Religious rhetoric is largely absent from public discourse, mosque attendance is low, and public displays of conservative Islamic dress

and culture are minimal. The Kosovo Serb population, of whom approximately 100,000 reside in Kosovo and 225,000 in Serbia and Montenegro, is largely Serbian Orthodox. Approximately 3 percent of ethnic Albanians are Roman Catholic. Protestants make up less than one percent of the population and have small populations in most of Kosovo's cities. Approximately 40 persons from two families in Prizren have some Jewish roots, but there are no synagogues or Jewish institutions.

Foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize. There are Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries active in Kosovo. There are approximately 69 faith-based or religious organizations registered with UNMIK which list their goals as the provision of humanitarian assistance or faith-based outreach.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

In 2001, UNMIK promulgated the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo (the "Constitutional Framework"), which established the PISG and replaced the UNMIK-imposed Joint Interim Administrative Structure. Following November 2001 central elections, the 120-member Kosovo Assembly held its inaugural session in late 2001. In 2002, the Assembly selected Kosovo's President, Prime Minister, and Government. Since that time, UNMIK has transferred most of the authority authorized by the Constitutional Framework to the PISG, while retaining authority in such areas as security and protection of communities.

Kosovo's Constitutional Framework incorporates international human rights conventions and treaties, including those provisions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religion and ethnicity; UNMIK and PISG generally respect this right in practice. UNMIK, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the PISG officially promote respect for religious freedom and tolerance in administering Kosovo and in carrying out programs for its reconstruction and development.

UNMIK recognizes as official holidays some, but not all, holy days of the Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox faiths. UNMIK recognizes the major religious Orthodox and Islamic holidays of Orthodox Christmas, Eid-al-Adha, Orthodox Easter Monday, Orthodox Assumption Day, the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and western Christmas.

There are no specific licensing regulations with regard to religious groups; however, to purchase property or receive funding from UNMIK or other international organizations, religious organizations must register with UNMIK as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Religious leaders have complained that they should have special status apart from that of NGOs.

In response to this complaint, the Kosovo Prime Minister's Office established a working group to draft a law on religious freedom and the legal status of religious communities; the group first met in 2003. The group consisted of representatives of the Catholic, Protestant and Islamic religious groups in Kosovo; however, Serbian Orthodox representatives have declined to participate. Nonetheless, the working group continued to provide Serbian Orthodox representatives with drafts of the law.

The Kosovo Assembly passed the first reading of the Religious Freedom Law, which would further protect the rights of religious communities and individuals. Protestant religious groups, a minority in Kosovo, initially reported that their input had not been incorporated into the law; the group later became a member with equal status of the legislative drafting working group. International observers, OSCE, and the Protestant community expressed concerns to USOP, UNMIK and the PISG about the following elements included in the initial draft document: the stipulation that each religious group's name include the word "Kosovo," that religious community leaders must be citizens of Kosovo, that the amount of funding received from the domestic budget be tied to the number of a religion's registered members, and that in order for a religion to be registered it has to be established for a minimum of 5 years and have a minimum of 500 members.

In December 2004, the SRS sent a letter to the Prime Minister's Office citing these concerns. The final draft had the objectionable elements removed and it reached the Assembly on May 20 and passed its first reading without amendment. Before the draft law's first reading, the Islamic community and Catholic leadership voiced to the USOP their own proposed amendments to this draft, which include: labeling the Islamic community the "only representative" of Kosovo Muslims, establishing a ministry of religion, and exempting religious communities from paying utilities. After the first reading in the Assembly, the law went back to parliamentary committee for further debate, and Islamic community leadership has lobbied local political leadership for inclusion of their amendments. The Speaker of the Assembly, the President of Kosovo and the leader of the political party in opposition then pub-

licly supported including the proposed changes as amendments during the second parliamentary reading to be held July 20. Following a second reading, the law is scheduled to be sent to the SRSG for final approval.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

UNMIK, the PISG, and KFOR policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Kosovo Islamic Community has at times publicly complained that Kosovo lacks genuine religious freedom, citing as examples UNMIK's refusal to provide radio frequencies for an Islamic radio station and the closing of a prayer room in the National Library by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology. The same community also alleged that although 32 acres have been allocated for building a Catholic cathedral in the municipality of Pristina, the Pristina Municipal Assembly refuses to grant their request to allocate space for new mosques for what the Islamic community claims is a growing Muslim population in Pristina. Some Kosovar Muslim leaders have complained that they were not consulted prior to registration of foreign Islamic NGOs with UNMIK.

During the period covered by this report, Kosovo political leaders—government and political party officials—have increasingly called for tolerance. During the end of August and the beginning of September 2004, then-Prime Minister Bajram Rexhepi and SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen visited Serb-inhabited areas in the municipalities of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Novobërde/Novo Brdo, Prizren, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and Pejë/Pec, appealing to Kosovo-Serbs to return. On February 27, 2005, former Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj addressed a letter to Kosovo citizens calling upon them to respect the rule of law and exercise tolerance, stating: “The Albanian majority has a special obligation towards the Serb community. They should be able to move freely in Kosovo.” During an April 2005 visit to Montenegro, Minister for Local Government Administration along with Minister for Returns and Communities Slavisha Petkovic, Minister of Local Government Administration Lutfi Haziri, appealed to all of Kosovo's displaced to return home.

Spurred by two separate events, the media openly debated the pros and cons of wearing the traditional Islamic headscarf in public. On May 23, 2005, a principal suspended a public school teacher for wearing a headscarf to class, citing a provision of Kosovo's law on education that obligates public institutions to adopt a neutral attitude towards religion when providing education. On May 29, Pristina Municipality's Department of Education dismissed the teacher. Another case in April 2005 involved a primary school student who was dismissed from class for wearing a headscarf. A similar case resulted in a June 2004 non-binding opinion from the Ombudsperson that the Ministry's interpretation should only apply to school teachers and officials, not students. Both parties have filed petitions with the Ministry of Education and formal complaints with Kosovo's Ombudsperson.

Protestants still report that they feel discriminated against in media access, particularly by the public Radio and Television Kosovo (RTK).

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

Prior to and following the March 2004 riots, KFOR and UNMIK international police, with increased participation of the KPS, reported a reduction in the number of crimes committed against Orthodox persons and sites. During July, August and September 2004, UNMIK reported no serious crimes with potentially ethnic motive. Assembly elections were held in October 2004, without the Serb population participating and without major ethnically-motivated incidents. In March, then-Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj called for calm after he was indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and the event passed without major incident. Both the elections and the indictment were seen locally and internationally as possible flash points for inter-ethnic violence and/or attacks on religious sites. In response to the lack of aggression following these probable “trigger events,” the SRSG and international community have praised both sides. One of the most serious challenges facing the international community in its administration of Kosovo has been to stop ethnically motivated attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches

and shrines and on the Orthodox population of Kosovo. Following the riots of March 2004 during which 30 Orthodox religious sites and more than 900 homes and businesses of ethnic minorities were burned or damaged, the number of attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches decreased steadily. Members of the PISG and some political leaders made efforts to communicate with Kosovo Serbs and Serbian Orthodox officials and expressed a public commitment to assist in their return and the reconstruction of damaged or destroyed churches.

Prompted by international organizations, Kosovo leaders sought to address the concerns of persons displaced by the violence and agreed to cooperate with religious site reconstruction after the March 2004 riots. On the basis of a Council of Europe damage assessment, the PISG allocated \$5.3 million (4.2 million euros) for the initial phase of the reconstruction of churches and monasteries damaged in the March riots. On March 25, 2005, after protracted negotiations with Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) officials, the PISG and SOC signed an MOU laying down the general principles of cooperation for the reconstruction process. On the basis of this MOU, representatives of the SOC, the Serbian Ministry of Culture and the PISG became part of an implementation committee chaired by an international heritage expert. However, the process stalled when Bishop Artemije of Raska and Prizren withdrew his assent to the MOU and participation in the committee. The international community, USOP, and the SRSG appealed to the Bishop to reconsider his decision, but to no result. However, Father Sava of Decan Monastery reports that during a week-long meeting from May 18 to May 25, 2005, of the Holy Synod of the SOC, church leadership decided to accept the PISG's funds.

In its March 2005 report on post-March 2004 conditions, UNMIK states that 348 individuals have been brought before Kosovo courts for riot-related offenses; of these 179 cases have been completed, 71 are awaiting trial, and 98 were still under investigation. At least 57 serious cases have been prosecuted by international lawyers and have concluded with sentences of up to 16 years in prison. Local judges have handed down more than 85 convictions, ranging from court reprimands and fines up to 200 euros (\$240) to convictions from two months to two years. In addition, on May 19, 2005, an international panel of judges of the Gjilan/Gnjilane District Court convicted six Albanians in connection with the killing of two Serbs during the March 2004 riots and sentenced them to a total of 38 years in prison. (One received 16 years, another 11, another three-and-a-half. Three others each received two and a half years in prison.)

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Ethnicity and religion are inextricably linked in Kosovo. While most Kosovo Albanians identify themselves as Muslim, the designation has more of a cultural than religious connotation. Kosovo Serbs identify themselves with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which defines not only their religious but also their cultural and historical perspectives. During and after the 1999 conflict, some Serbian Orthodox leaders played a moderating political role, but most have since withdrawn from political life as secular Serb leaders have stepped forward, especially following the November 2001 elections and subsequent establishment of Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self Government.

Societal violence continued but decreased sharply from the last reporting period. Of 32 killings in Kosovo from July 2004 through January 31, 2005, there was one Serb victim and that crime was found to be neither ethnic nor politically motivated. Although tension between communities has remained high, the prevailing crime trend is against property instead of persons. In 2004, 59 percent of potential ethnically motivated incidents were property-related offences. There were some reported incidents of rock-throwing and other assaults against Serbian Orthodox clergy as they traveled outside of their monasteries, and monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly remained unable to use parts of the monasteries' properties due to concerns about safety.

The 2004 report cited a media story claiming that an imam was kidnapped and assaulted by masked assailants. After an investigation, UNMIK police forces have determined this incident did not occur.

Security concerns continued to affect the Serb community and its freedom of movement and also affected their freedom to worship, particularly after the March riots. Some Kosovo Serbs asserted that they were not able to travel freely to practice their faith due to security concerns. Serb families with relatives living in both Kosovo and Serbia were restricted by security concerns from traveling for religious holidays or ceremonies, including weddings and funerals. Father Sava told USOP that KFOR stopped escorting non-clergy parishioners to religious sites in April 2005, and he has seen attendance at services decline as a result. Sava also reports that

when traveling through Kosovo, his van is sometimes pelted with stones and verbal insults, although he and his co-religious generally traveled freely and without incident on Kosovo's main highways during the period covered by this report. Father Sava and Bishop Teodosije both traveled to USOP, escorted but without incident, on June 8, 2005, for a visit with the Department of State Undersecretary for Political Affairs, a visit preceded by their first tour of Pristina in six years. On April 21, 2005, KFOR withdrew its last two armored cars from the bridge connecting majority Serb-inhabited Mitrovica North and Kosovo Albanian dominated Mitrovica South and on April 29 opened 24-hour passage on the bridge, although KFOR stands ready to re-secure the bridge at a moment's notice. On January 8, 2005, checkpoints and barbed wire were removed from the Serbian village of Binca and UNMIK announced that enclaves no longer existed in Klina municipality.

Some minor attacks on Serbian Orthodox religious sites continued during the period covered by this report. Father Sava reports that in Gjakova/Djakovica municipality, some graves were vandalized in Piskote village, and some family members told him bodies were removed. Serbian media reported on May 12, 2005, that an explosive device was found 200 meters from an Orthodox church in Viti/Vitina; the investigation is still ongoing.

Local media reported that that a Catholic cemetery in Prizren vandalized in 2001, was vandalized again on May 24, 2005.

Many of the churches and monasteries burned in the March 2004 riots were constructed in the 14th century and are considered part of Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage. Father Sava provided a comprehensive list of religious sites destroyed or damaged between March 17 and 19. The list included 30 sites altogether in the following 14 locations: Prizren, Rahovec, Gjakova, Skenderaj, Peja, Ferizaj, Kamenica, Shtime, Pristina, Fushe Kosove, Vushtrri, Obiliq, Mitrovica, and Podujevo. A Council of Europe mission to assess the damage concluded that approximately \$11.83 million (9.7 million euros) would be required to repair and restore the damaged sites. A joint commission with representation from the PISG, Serbian Orthodox Church and international donors is in the process of issuing tenders and repair is expected to begin shortly after.

On May 13, 2005, UNESCO, in cooperation with UNMIK, the Council of Europe, and the European Commission, held an international donor's conference in Paris for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage in Kosovo. The conference determined that 75 priority cultural and religious monuments and sites would be restored, among them 48 Serbian Orthodox (including the Decani Monastery which UNESCO classified a World Heritage Site in 2004), 14 Islamic and 13 secular/historical. Attending with the SRSG, the Minister of Culture distributed an inflammatory document disavowing the historical validity of the Serbian Orthodox monuments and describing a singular Kosovo-Albanian history in Kosovo. The SRSG immediately condemned this action and retrieved all the documents. The Synod has called for the minister's immediate resignation.

In addition, problems with the unfinished Serbian church located on University of Pristina grounds continued. During the 1990s, the Serb-dominated administration in Pristina during the 1990s gave the land on which the church sits to the Serbian Orthodox Church. In 2003, the Pristina Municipal Assembly passed a resolution to return the land to the University. The UNMIK representative in the Pristina municipal government immediately suspended this decision, and no further action has been taken to date. In February 2005, a Christian cross attached to the church was bent. The media reported that Roma from Albania were squatting around the unfinished church for several months until they were removed in April after Orthodox leaders sent an open letter to the SRSG complaining of the situation.

In light of societal violence in Kosovo against properties owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian Orthodox religious symbols, UNMIK authorities continued to provide special security measures to protect religious sites and to ensure that members of all religious groups could worship safely. KFOR deployed security contingents at religious sites throughout Kosovo to protect them from further destruction, such as that which had occurred immediately after KFOR's intervention in 1999; however, KFOR gave priority to saving persons' lives rather than property and was unable to stop the burning and destruction of many sites in March 2004. Due to improving security conditions and decreasing interethnic tensions in some areas, KFOR removed static checkpoints from most churches and religious sites during the period covered by this report, relying instead on patrols by the U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and indigenous Kosovo Police Service (KPS). In most cases, such changes in security measures did not result in a change in the level of safety of, or access to, the religious sites. During the March 2004 riots, KFOR, CIVPOL and KPS were involved in crowd control and protecting lives and property. The priority was evacuating persons over saving property, even religious property.

Immediately following the March riots, the process of transfer of jurisdiction over local police stations from KFOR to CIVPOL and KPS was halted; transfer has since continued and 27 of 32 jurisdictions in Kosovo are now under local KPS patrol.

Although previously Protestants have reported suffering violence and discrimination, during the period covered by this report they had no major complaints and even said they perceived a slight improvement. They reported discrimination through verbal attacks and exclusion from interfaith initiatives by the Islamic leadership who defended their actions on the grounds that Protestants are not considered a "traditional" religion in Kosovo. They also stated that while public television station RTK as an institution has not specifically reported on the Protestant religion, some individuals within the RTK had a more positive approach. In March 2005, these individuals organized a religious program and invited Protestant representatives. Protestants also reported slight discrimination in schools where sometimes parents of pupils were allegedly called in to deter their children from following Protestantism.

On April 13, 2005, Kosovo-Albanian municipal authorities called upon Serbs to return to Frahser/Svinjare village, which has been entirely rebuilt following its destruction during the March 2004 riots. On January 8, 2005, UNMIK announced it had removed checkpoints and barbed wire from the Serb village of Binca in Klina municipality; they reported that residents felt safe and were not harassed.

Catholic leaders reported that they had good relations with the Muslim community but hardly had any contact with the Orthodox leadership, whom they consider highly politicized. Orthodox leadership believes the same of the Catholic leadership. The Muslim community made similar remarks concerning their relationship with the Catholic leadership and lack of relationship with the Orthodox community.

In September 2004, Radio Free Europe together with Serbia's TV Most broadcast a dialogue between Serbian Orthodox Father Sava and Qeamail Morina, an associate dean at the Islamic Faculty in Pristina. This was the first dialogue and first contact between a representative of the SOC and the Islamic religious community in Kosovo since the events of March 2004. Both the Islamic community and Father Sava report no dialogue has since occurred between the two entities, although the Islamic community said it has informally reached out to invite dialogue with Orthodox leaders.

On May 1, 2005, the Decan monastery hosted the SRS, USOP's Chief of Mission, the local municipal president and the PISG's minister for environment and spatial planning, Ardian Gjini, for Orthodox Easter services. Father Sava described the event as "positive" and had a "moderate" conversation with Kosovo-Albanians—an effort he plans to continue with the municipal president and Gjini.

The withdrawal of FRY and Serbian troops from Kosovo in 1999 and establishment of UNMIK resulted in an improved situation for the majority, largely Muslim, ethnic Albanian population, and a cessation of attacks on their mosques and religious sites.

Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic leaders have attempted to encourage tolerance and peace in Kosovo, in both the religious and political spheres.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and has sought to promote ethnic and religious tolerance in Kosovo. U.S. officials have also maintained close contacts with religious leaders.

The U.S. is involved actively in UNMIK, whose goal is to secure peace, facilitate refugee return and reconstruction, lay the foundations for democratic self-government, and foster respect for human rights regardless of ethnicity or religion.

U.S. KFOR peacekeeping troops have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo and have guarded religious sites. USKFOR was credited with preventing the situation from further escalation in their sector during the March 2004 riots and they have increased their presence within the sector they patrol.

The U.S. Government funded the remainder of a survey of Islamic manuscripts in Kosovo to help the local Islamic community preserve its religious heritage.

The Department of State funds a U.N. international police (CIVPOL) advisor in Pristina and provided \$40 million (31.86 million euros) to support KPS and CIVPOL. KPS and CIVPOL have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo.

The Department of State provides \$3.5 million in funding for returns programs for Muslim and Orthodox Roma, Orthodox Serbs, and Muslim Bosnians. USOP also funds a locally-engaged staff member dedicated to this issue.

In the wake of the March 2004 inter-ethnic violence, U.S. officers met with Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic authorities to discuss ways of supporting reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. Many high-level U.S. Government and military officials visited Kosovo and met with both political and religious leaders to assess the situation and urge reconstruction and progress toward a multiethnic Kosovo and continued to do so. The U.S. Office also urged the Kosovo government to quickly reconstruct Serb homes and allow UNESCO to take the lead on reconstruction of destroyed and damaged religious sites in Kosovo. At the May 13 donor's conference in Paris, USG pledged one million dollars for this purpose.

On July 14, 2004, representatives of the PISG, leaders of Kosovo Albanian political parties and representatives of the Serb community reached an agreement at the U.S. Office for establishing the Ministry for Returns and Communities within the Government.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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; however, anti-Semitism persisted among some elements of the population.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 18,859 square miles, and its population is 5,396,193. According to the 2001 census, the number of persons who claimed a religious affiliation increased from 72.8 percent in 1991 to 84.1 percent in 2001. This increase may be in part due to greater willingness among persons to state their affiliation, unlike in 1991 immediately after the fall of communism. According to the census, there were 3,708,120 Roman Catholics (68.9 percent of the population), 372,858 Augsburg Lutherans (6.9 percent), 219,831 Byzantine Catholics (4.1 percent), 109,735 members of the Reformed Christian Church (2 percent), 50,363 Orthodox Christians (1 percent), and 20,630 members of Jehovah's Witnesses. There were also approximately 3,562 Baptists, 3,217 Brethren Church members, 3,429 Seventh-day Adventists, 3,905 Apostolic Church members, 7,347 Evangelical Methodist Church members, 3,000 Jews, 1,733 Old Catholic Church members, 6,519 Christian Corps in Slovakia members, and 1,696 Czechoslovak Husite Church members. According to the 2001 census, 12 percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation, and 2 percent were undecided. There were also some Muslims living in the country, primarily immigrants from Middle Eastern countries, international students, or Albanian immigrants. Estimates of the Muslim population vary from 300 to 3,000.

There are three categories of nonregistered religions that comprise approximately 30 groups: nontraditional religions (Ananda Marga, Hare Krishna, Yoga in Daily Life, Osho, Sahadza Yoga, Shambaola Slovakia, Sri Chinmoy, Zazen International Slovakia, Zen Centermyo Sahn Sah, Rosicrucians, and Raelians); the religious societies termed "syncretic" by the Government (Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, Movement of the Holy Grail, and the Baha'i Faith); and the Christian religious societies (The Church of Christ, Manna Church, International Association of Full Evangelium Traders, Christian Communities, Church of the Nazarenes, New Revelation, Word of International Life, Society of the Friends of Jesus Christ, Sword of Spirit, Disciples of Jesus Christ, Universal Life, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Free Peoples' Mission, Presbyterian Church Emmanuel, and Brothers in Christ (Christadelphians)).

The number of immigrants is statistically insignificant. There are very small numbers of refugees and migrants who practice different faiths from the majority of native-born citizens. Missionaries do not register with the Government, and no official statistics exist, although according to government information, there are missionaries from the Roman Catholic, Augsburg Lutheran, and Methodist faiths, as well as a Jewish emissary, active in the country. Among the nonregistered churches, there are a significant number of Mormon missionaries.

There is some correlation between religious differences and ethnic or political differences. The Christian Democratic Party (KDH), which has ties to the Catholic faith, is the only political party with an explicitly religious agenda. The Slovak Democratic Christian Union (SDKU) is a Christian Democratic party similar to those found in many western European countries, and the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) also has a Christian wing.

Followers of the Orthodox Church live predominantly in the eastern part of the country. The Ruthenian minority are typically adherents to the Orthodox faith. The Reformed Christian Church exists primarily in the south, near the border with Hungary, where many ethnic Hungarians live. Other religious groups tend to be spread evenly across the country.

According to polling data, the number of religious practitioners continues to increase following the fall of Communism, and approximately 54 percent of Catholics and 22 percent of Lutherans actively participate in formal religious services.

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 provides for the right to practice the religion of one's choice, the right to change religion or faith, and the right to refrain from any religious affiliation. The Government observes and enforces these provisions in practice.

The law provides for freedom of religion and defines the status of religious groups, including those groups not registered with the Government. It does not prohibit the existence of nontraditional religions. It allows the Government to enter agreements with religious communities. The law is applied and enforced in a nondiscriminatory fashion.

Governmental entities at all levels, including the courts, interpret the law in a way that protects religious freedom.

No official state religion exists; however, because of the numbers of adherents, Catholicism is considered the dominant religion. The Catholic Church receives significantly larger government subsidies because of the higher percentage of Catholics in the country. In 2001, the Government signed an international treaty with the Vatican, which provides the legal framework for relations between the country's Catholic Church, the Government, and the Vatican. Four corollaries to the framework treaty have been proposed. In 2002, the Government signed an agreement with 11 other registered religious groups in an attempt to counterbalance the Vatican agreement and provide equal status to the remaining registered religions. This agreement is subordinate to national law and subject to amendment by statute; the Vatican treaty, as an international agreement, can be amended only through international legal mechanisms.

In 2002, the Government approved one of the corollaries regarding military service for priests. In 2003, the President signed a second corollary regarding religious education, which was approved by Parliament in January 2004. An identical agreement was signed with 11 other registered religions. This treaty mandates that all public elementary schools require children to take either a religion class or an ethics class, depending on their (or their parents') preference. This was previously required only for students in fifth through ninth grade. Private schools affiliated with a particular religion do not need to provide classes in other religions. These courses are often taught by religious leaders, and the religious groups are responsible for providing instructors, although their salaries are paid from the government budget. There is a lack of qualified teachers for certain religions. Some representatives of religious groups complain that the status of religious lecturers is not equal to that of regular teachers. Religious lecturers are usually hired on contract and are not paid during the 2-month summer vacation. There was some concern about possible ostracism of student members of smaller religions, who might be one of a small group requesting the class, especially in smaller municipalities. Despite these resource concerns, smaller churches reiterated that they were still generally pleased with the system.

The remaining two corollaries to the Vatican treaty, including a proposal to allow Catholic employees to refuse to perform official functions on religious grounds, remained under consideration at the end of the period covered by this report.

Registration of religious groups is not required, but under existing law, only registered religious groups have the explicit right to conduct public worship services and other activities, although no specific religions or practices are banned or dis-

couraged by the authorities in practice. Those that register receive government benefits, including subsidies for clergymen, office expenses, the right to visit and proselytize in prisons and hospitals, and access to public television broadcasting. Government funding also is provided to religious schools and to teachers who lecture on religion in state schools. The Government occasionally subsidizes one-time projects and significant religious activities, and registered religious groups are partly exempt from paying taxes and import custom fees. A religion may elect not to accept the subsidies.

There are currently 16 registered religious groups in the country; the last group to successfully register was the Apostolic Church in 2001.

To register a new religion, a group must submit a list of 20,000 permanent residents who adhere to that religion. Fourteen of the religions already established before the law passed in 1991 were exempt from this membership requirement. Although the Nazarene and the Muslim communities existed in the country prior to 1991, they were never properly registered and, therefore, were not given registered status under the 1991 law. Two additional religious groups have been allowed to register since 1991: the Jehovah's Witnesses and the New Apostolic Church. Leaders of a number of minority religious communities, in particular Muslims, smaller Protestant churches, the Hare Krishna community, and the Church of Scientology, have in previous years complained that they did not meet the membership requirement, which effectively barred them from obtaining registered status. Nonregistered religious groups may not build public places of worship or conduct legally valid religious ceremonies such as weddings. In 2000, the Muslim community in Bratislava purchased a plot of land with the hope of building an Islamic center. While they previously speculated that municipal officials were denying them permission for the construction, it appears that financial problems, zoning questions, and a lack of identifiable leadership in the Muslim community could have also affected the construction delay. Several of Bratislava's Muslims also criticized the registration law, noting that the community in the Czech Republic was able to submit an application for first-tier registration under Czech law (300 or more citizen member signatures).

Because the law on registration of religious groups does not provide for registration of nontheistic groups, the Department of Church Affairs suggested that an atheist group that had made inquiries into obtaining registration might find funding from the Department of Minority Culture.

There are no specific licensing or registration requirements for foreign missionaries or religious organizations. The law allows all religious groups to send out their representatives as well as to receive foreign missionaries without limitation. Missionaries neither need special permission to stay in the country, nor are their activities regulated in any way.

Joint education projects on Jewish history and culture for elementary and high school teachers have been successful and well received. The Government continues to seek full membership in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. In 2004, teachers continued to visit U.S. universities to participate in summer training programs; 25 Slovak teachers visited the concentration camp in Dachau, and 20 teachers traveled to Terezin for training on Holocaust education in the Czech Republic. To assist teachers with instruction about the Holocaust, the Ministry of Education published a textbook, "Why We Learn about the Holocaust," during the reporting period and distributed it to four teacher-training centers. In 2003, a Holocaust Documentation Center was established as a joint project of the Bratislava Jewish community and the Milan Simecka Foundation; and after May 2005, the Union of Jewish Communities and the Simecka Foundation took over its administration. It has released several publications dealing with the Holocaust in the country, Jewish wartime history, and memoirs of Jewish personalities.

There are several religious holidays that are celebrated as national holidays, including Epiphany, the Day of the Virgin Mary of the Seven Sorrows, All Saints Day, St. Stephen's Day, Christmas, and Easter. A treaty with the Vatican prohibits the removal or alteration of existing religious holidays considered as state holidays.

The Department of Church Affairs at the Ministry of Culture oversees relations between religious groups and the State and manages the distribution of state subsidies to religious groups and associations. However, the Ministry cannot intervene in the internal affairs of religious groups and does not direct their activities. The Ministry administers a cultural state fund, Pro Slovakia, which among other things allocates money to cover the repair of religious monuments. Public cooperation was integral to the reconstruction of a Jewish cemetery in Bratislava, which involved re-routing tram tracks. The site, including the grave of 19th-century Jewish scholar Chatam Sofer, was restored in 2001 with substantial financing from the Bratislava

Local Council as well as from a foreign organization, the International Committee for the Preservation of the Gravesites of Geonai in Pressburg.

Under the auspices of the government Office for National Minorities and Human Rights, an official agreement was signed between the Government and the Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches to conclude property disputes stemming from the Communist and post-World War II eras. Since 1989, the Government has promoted interfaith dialogue and understanding by supporting events organized by various religious groups. The state-supported Ecumenical Council of Churches promotes communication within the religious community. Most Christian churches have the status of members or observers in the Council. The Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic (UZZNO) was invited and participates in its activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Although government support is provided in a nondiscriminatory manner to registered religious groups that seek it, the requirement that a registered organization have 20,000 members disadvantages smaller faiths. Some property restitution cases remain unresolved.

The Institute of State-Church Relations monitors and researches religious "cults" and "sects"; however, it is difficult to identify these groups because they largely register as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than as religious groups. The Institute conducts seminars, issues publications, and provides information to the media regarding its findings. The Institute's budget comes mainly from the Ministry of Culture's general fund, although it has received some grants for its projects from other sources. Other organizations not funded by the Government, such as the Center for the Study of Sects, engage in similar work.

Law 282/93 on Restitution of Communal Property enabled all religious groups to apply for the return of their property confiscated by the communist government. The deadline for these claims was December 31, 1994. The property was returned in its existing condition, and the Government did not provide any compensation for the damage done to it during the previous regime. The property was returned by the Government, municipalities, state legal entities, and under certain conditions by private persons. In some cases, the property was returned legally by the Government, but it was not vacated by the former tenant, often a school or hospital with nowhere else to go.

There also have been problems with the return of property that had been undeveloped at the time of seizure but upon which there since has been construction. Churches, synagogues, and cemeteries have been returned, albeit mostly in poor condition. Religious groups often lack the funds to restore these properties to a usable condition. The main obstacles to the resolution of outstanding restitution claims are the Government's lack of financial resources, due to its austerity program, and bureaucratic resistance on the part of those entities required to vacate restitutable properties. The Reformed Christian Church has been vocal regarding its unfulfilled restitution claims. According to their representatives, the new restitution law that went into effect in May 2005 addresses some complex property claims, but it does not resolve the cases of approximately 70 church premises (church schools, teachers' facilities, etc.) that were owned by individual parishes and nationalized by the Communist government after 1948. Reformed Christian Church officials also complained that the Government does not allow church organizations to draw from European Union structural funds for social purposes. The Church exists primarily in poorer areas of the country where there is little money for restoration; it is seeking funds from abroad.

The Orthodox Church reported that all of its claims for restitution have been settled, while the Catholic Church reported that more than half of the property that it had claimed had been returned. In another 12 percent of cases, the property had been returned legally to the Church but typically was occupied by other tenants and would require court action to be returned to church hands. The Church had not received any compensation for the remaining 40 percent of claims since these properties were undeveloped at the time of nationalization but were developed later. The Church also is not eligible to reacquire lands that originally were registered to church foundations that no longer exist or no longer operate in the country, such as the Benedictines.

UZZNO had reported some successful cases of restitution and had only a few pending cases that required resolution. These include cases in which property had been restituted to UZZNO but not in usable condition, cases in which the property still was occupied by previous tenants, and lands upon which buildings had been constructed after the seizure of the property. UZZNO was also disappointed that a

number of municipalities had not respected a valid restitution law that returns property previously owned by Jewish community members. One example was the current dispute over a large house “claimed, but not yet restituted,” to the Jewish community, but sold instead to the current tenants of the house (including a member of the Bratislava city council). The suit regarding the property was ongoing, and both parties had received court rulings they claimed gave them ownership of the property.

In 2004, the Bratislava City Government proposed to evict the state-run Jewish Museum from its current location unless it would pay a higher, market-rate rent rather than the nominal rate that it was paying. The museum responded that it did not have the funds to pay the higher rent. Jewish community leaders suggested that the city owes some consideration to them since it owns many other buildings that once belonged to Jewish Holocaust victims. While this building was not among them, it was occupied by many who also perished in the concentration camps. At the end of the period covered by this report, there had been no new developments.

Following two years of negotiations, the Deputy Prime Minister’s office drafted a proposal of compensation for heirless property owned by Jewish families before the Holocaust. In 2002, the Cabinet agreed to \$18,747,253 (SKK 850 million) in compensation for this property. The entire amount was placed into an account at the Slovak National Bank, and one-third was made available immediately as needed due to the advancing age of Holocaust survivors. The Jewish community would draw interest on the account for 10 years before receiving the remaining principal. The community intended to use the funds to compensate some community members as well as to fund social, educational, and cultural programs.

UZZNO has filed a lawsuit against Germany to reclaim compensation for monies paid by the wartime Slovak government to Germany to cover the cost of Germany’s deportation of 57,000 members of Slovakia’s Jewish population. UZZNO lost the lawsuit in 2003 and immediately appealed. Should the German courts refuse the appeal, Jewish leaders plan to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Few communication problems existed among the major faiths, and there were several ecumenical organizations that fostered closer relationships. The Ecumenical Council of Churches operated and represented several religions.

Anti-Semitism persists among some elements of society, manifested occasionally in incidences of violence and vandalism. According to estimates, 500 to 800 neo-Nazis and 3,000 to 5,000 sympathizers operate in the country and commit serious offenses; however, only a small number of these abuses are prosecuted. The Penal Code stipulates that anyone who publicly demonstrates sympathy towards fascism or movements oppressing human rights and freedoms can be sentenced to jail for up to three years. Police recently broke up a skinhead concert in the eastern part of the country. Legislation is similar to that of neighboring countries, but court delays have prevented comparable improvements in the situation. Religious minorities have not yet had to avail themselves of protections provided by a new anti-discrimination law passed in 2004.

The low number of prosecutions for racially motivated crime generally improved over the past two years because of the creation of a specialized police unit, an advisor in the Bratislava Regional Police, and increased training. Their successes included the arrest of 24 skinheads, including a major neo-Nazi organizer, at a large meeting in 2003. In another 2004 success, the Bratislava Police checked 158 suspected meeting places of extremist groups in an overnight raid, which resulted in 14 arrests. Because of this monitoring unit and its NGO advisory board, the police were better trained in identifying neo-Nazi members and more informed about their activities. Interior Minister Vladimir Palko had an advisor on racially motivated crime who participated actively on the Government’s advisory commission with NGOs. The Ministry of Interior has assigned specialists on hate crimes to each of the country’s eight regions.

Some organizations, such as the official cultural organization Matica Slovenska and the Slovak National Party, continue to seek the rehabilitation of former leaders of the Nazi-collaborationist state under Josef Tiso. Meetings and demonstrations to commemorate the anniversary of the first Slovak state from World War II occur each year throughout the country. At these and other events, extremists frequently appear in the uniforms of the Hlinka guards, who identified and sent Jewish people to the concentration camps during World War II. In March 2005, 200 people dressed in Hlinka guard uniforms marched through Bratislava to commemorate the anniversary of the establishment of the Fascist Slovak state in 1939. Jewish community groups complained that the government had not done enough to investigate and identify the benefactors of this group.

Despite protests by UZZNO, Matica Slovenska gave Jozef Mikus, a top official in the Tiso regime, an award for the protection of human rights. Former President Schuster also was criticized for awarding the Pribina Cross, 1st Class, to Mikus for his contributions to the country. Jozef Mikus was employed with the Foreign Ministry during the Tiso regime and fled the country after the war to escape imprisonment.

A Jewish cemetery was desecrated during the period covered by this report. It was likely desecrated between December 2004 and January 2005, although the precise date is unknown. Nine tombstones were overturned but not seriously damaged. Police were able to identify the two juvenile perpetrators, who remained under investigation at the time of this report. An UZZNO official claimed that the case appeared to be one of simple vandalism, but racial motivation could not be ruled out. Vandals regularly spray-paint anti-Semitic slogans and topple or break gravestones. In most cases, police have caught adolescent perpetrators, who are sentenced to pay at least part of the cost of the repairs. Jewish community leaders stated they were satisfied with the Government's response to these incidents, and they did not believe that the communities supported this vandalism. In one notable sentencing that occurred during the period covered by this report, a judge sentenced vandals to unconditional jail sentences, which the Jewish community felt sent a needed message to the community.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintained contacts with a broad spectrum of religious groups. The Embassy encouraged tolerance for minority religions. Embassy officers and official visitors met with officials of major and minor religious groups on a regular basis to discuss property restitution issues as well as human rights conditions.

The Embassy continued its dialogue with the Conference of Bishops, the Federation of Jewish Communities, and the Orthodox Church. The Embassy has good relations with the Ministry of Culture and fostered an effective dialogue between religious groups, the Ministry of Culture, and the Commission for the Preservation of U.S. Heritage Abroad on matters of importance to the commission.

Embassy officers played an active role assisting in restitution cases involving U.S. citizens and aided the Government in its attempts to become a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research and to initiate a liaison project on Holocaust education in cooperation with the task force. Embassy officers continued to be active in perpetuating this successful project.

SLOVENIA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 7,827 square miles, and its population is approximately 1,964,036. Estimates of religious identification vary. According to the 2002 census, the numbers are: Roman Catholic, 1,135,626; evangelical, 14,736; other Protestant, 1,399; Orthodox, 45,908; other Christian, 1,877; Muslim, 47,488; Jewish, 99; Oriental, 1,026; other religion, 558; Agnostic, 271; Believer, but belongs to no religion, 68,714; unbeliever/atheist, 199,264; no reply, 307,973; unknown, 139,097.

The Orthodox and Muslim populations appear to correspond to the country's immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively. These groups tend to have a lower socioeconomic status in society.

Foreign missionaries, including a mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and other religious groups (including Hare Krishna, Church of Scientology, and the Unification Church) operate without hindrance.

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 are no formal requirements for recognition as a religion by the Government. Religious communities must register with the Government's Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be legal entities, and registration entitles such groups to rebates on value-added taxes. There are currently 40 religious communities officially registered, up from 36 in 2003. One case remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Registered religious groups, including foreign missionaries, may receive value-added tax rebates on a quarterly basis from the Ministry of Finance. All groups report equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

The appropriate role for religious instruction in schools continued to be an issue of debate. In 2004, several political parties proposed that religious instruction be made compulsory; however, the Ministry of Education rejected the initiative on the basis of existing legislation. The Constitution states that parents are entitled to give their children "a moral and religious upbringing." Only those schools supported by religious bodies taught religion.

After independence in 1991, Parliament passed legislation calling for denationalization (restitution or compensation) within a fixed period. The law provides for denationalization of church properties—church buildings and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests—that were nationalized after World War II by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. By March 31, 2005, the Government had completed 34,465 (90 percent) of the 38,156 denationalization claims filed. In 2004, the Government reallocated existing resources to reduce the backlog in cases, and there was improvement in speeding up resolution of cases.

The Roman Catholic Church was a major property holder in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II. After the war, much church property was confiscated and nationalized by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Despite the Catholic Church's numerical predominance, restitution of its property remains a politically unpopular issue. In 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture issued a decree returning approximately 20,396 acres of forest in Triglav National Park to the Catholic Church; however, in 2002, the Ljubljana Administrative Court annulled this decree in response to multiple legal challenges. The Catholic Church challenged the annulment in the Supreme Court, and a portion of the forest lands was returned in late 2003. In March 2005, property located in eastern Slovenia was returned to the Catholic Church.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, it has been government policy since 1991 to pay the share of social insurance contribution for clergy and other full time religious workers that is normally paid by an employer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Muslim community has experienced difficulty in receiving permission from the Government to build mosques.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Societal attitudes toward religion are complex. Historical events dating from long before the country's independence color societal perceptions regarding the dominant Catholic Church. Much of the gulf between the (at least nominally) Catholic center-right and the largely agnostic or atheistic left stemmed from the massacre of large numbers of alleged Nazi and Fascist collaborators in the years 1946–48. Many of the so-called collaborators were successful businessmen whose assets were confiscated after they were killed or driven from the country, and many were prominent Catholics. After independence, right-of-center political groups called for a purge of communist government and business officials, but this call quickly was replaced by one for reconciliation. Since religious undertones today are minor and tangential, this issue no longer attracts much public attention.

Interfaith relations were generally amicable, although there was little warmth between the majority Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups that were viewed as aggressive proselytizers. Societal attitudes toward the minority Jewish, Muslim and Serb Orthodox communities generally were tolerant; however, some persons feared the possible emergence of Muslim fundamentalism. While there are no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom of worship, services commonly are held in private homes under cramped conditions.

There are no mosques in the capital of Ljubljana. The lack of a mosque has been due, in part, to a lack of Muslim community organization and to complex legislation and bureaucracy in construction and land regulations. The Muslim community has conceptual plans to build a new facility in Ljubljana. In 2001, the Ljubljana Municipality Council selected one of five potential sites that the city previously had identified for the facility and tasked the city's planning department to begin preparing the materials necessary to move ahead with the project. At the beginning of 2003, Ljubljana city officials expressed support for the Mosque and the location on which it was to be built. Plans for building the mosque were stalled in part because of discovery that part of the land the city identified as for sale to the Muslim community was subject to a denationalization claim by the Catholic Church. The Church has agreed to forgo its claim if the city will compensate it with another piece of property. At the end of the period covered by this report, negotiations were ongoing.

In early October 2004, a Jewish family grave was desecrated; police had not identified the perpetrators by the end of the period covered by this report. Such acts are extremely rare. However, Jewish community representatives reported prejudice, ignorance, and false stereotypes and negative images of Jews within society. Negative portrayals of Jews were common in private commentary, and citizens generally did not consider Jews to be a native population.

The Government promotes anti-bias and tolerance education through its programs in primary and secondary schools, with the Holocaust as an obligatory topic in the contemporary history curriculum. However, teachers have a great deal of latitude in deciding how much time to devote to it. The country formally joined in the Council of Europe's 2004 proclamation of May 9, as Holocaust Memorial Day. Schools carried out various activities to remember the Holocaust on May 9, for example, watching documentaries, writing assignments and holding discussions on the topic.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy has held extensive discussions with the Government on the topic of property denationalization in the context of the rule of law, although it has not discussed specifically church property. In addition, the Embassy has made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project. The Embassy meets with members of all major religious communities, representatives of nongovernmental organizations that address

religious freedom issues, and government officials from relevant offices and ministries.

SPAIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the Catholic Church enjoys some privileges unavailable to other faiths.

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 relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 194,897 square miles, and its population is approximately 43.9 million.

The law prohibits the collection of census data based on religious belief, which limits the ability to compile statistical data on the number of adherents in the country. The Center for Sociological Investigation (CIS), an autonomous state agency, collects statistics on religious trends in the society. In February 2005, a CIS survey reported that 79.3 percent of citizens consider themselves Catholic; however, 47.1 percent stated that they never attend Mass. Among non-Catholics, 11.7 percent said that they were agnostics, 4.9 percent said that they were atheists, and approximately 2 percent said that they practiced other religions.

The Episcopal Conference of Spain (CEE) estimates that there are approximately 34 million Catholics in the country. The director of the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) stated that FEREDE represents 400,000 evangelical Christians and other Protestants, but estimates that 30 percent of its members are immigrants from Latin America and Africa. FEREDE also estimates that there are 800,000 foreign Protestants, mostly European, who reside in the country at least 6 months of each year. There is little comprehensive information on the Muslim community in the country; and estimates place its size anywhere from 500,000 to 1,000,000. The Federation of Spanish Islamic Entities (FEERI) estimates that there are close to 1 million Muslims, including both legal and illegal immigrants. Recent government estimates support local source reports that there are 40,000 to 50,000 Jews in the country. There are approximately 9,000 practicing Buddhists.

The majority of Muslims are recent immigrants from Morocco, but there are also Algerians, Pakistanis, and immigrants from other Arab or Islamic countries, as well as a number of Spanish converts to Islam. The Ministry of Justice's Office of Religious Affairs notes that although the majority of Muslim immigrants come from Islamic countries, there is also a small number of Christians who emigrated from countries such as Egypt and Lebanon. In April 2005, the National Institute of Statistics reported that immigrants from Morocco were the largest immigrant group in the country. Moroccan nationals represent 13.7 percent of the 3.7 million immigrants in the country. There are 386,958 Moroccans living in the country legally and as many as 120,000 illegal Moroccan immigrants.

Most Orthodox Christians are from Eastern European countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, and the Ukraine. Immigrants who practice evangelical religions tend to come from African and Latin American countries, according to government officials.

The country's largest cities, Madrid and Barcelona, host the largest number of religious confessions, according to Government officials. The last government census taken in 2002 indicated that the largest communities of immigrants from predominantly Islamic countries were located in the autonomous communities of Catalonia, Andalusia, Madrid, Valencia, Murcia, and the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The population of orthodox Christian communities is largest in Aragon and Valencia. The country also hosts a number of foreign missionaries of evangelical Christian, Mormon, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Islamic faiths.

In January 2005, the Register of Religious Entities maintained by the Ministry of Justice listed 12,453 entities created by the Catholic Church. There are 1,388 non-Catholic churches, denominations, and communities in the register, including 1,064 Protestant church entities. Protestant entities include 305 charismatic churches, 128 Assemblies of Brethren, 228 Baptist churches, 125 Pentecostal churches, 38

Presbyterian churches, one Evangelical Church of Philadelphia, 10 Church of Christ churches, one Salvation Army entity, 18 Anglican churches, 63 interdenominational churches, 35 Churches for Attention to Foreigners, 4 Seventh-day Adventist churches, 3 Reformed Adventist churches, and 121 other evangelical churches. In addition there are also 10 Orthodox churches, 4 Churches of Christ, Scientist, one Jehovah's Witnesses entity, 1 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 1 Unification Church, 10 entities of other Christian confessions, 16 entities of Judaism, 254 entities of Islam, 11 entities of the Baha'i Faith, 3 entities of Hinduism, 21 entities of Buddhism, and 3 entities of other confessions. The Church of Scientology is present in the country, although the Ministry of Justice has declined to register it as a religious organization.

The number of non-Catholic churches and religious communities in the country may be much larger. Some religious groups choose to register as cultural organizations with the regional governments rather than with the national registry of religious entities in Madrid because the national registration process can take up to 6 months and requires much paperwork.

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. Discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs is illegal.

Article 16 of the Constitution provides for religious freedom and the freedom of worship by individuals and groups. It also states, "No faith shall have the character of a state religion." However, the Government provides certain public financing benefits to the Catholic Church that are not available to other religious entities in practice. These benefits derive from four accords signed with the Holy See in 1979. They cover economic, religious education, military, and judicial matters. The Catholic Church receives financing through voluntary tax contributions and direct payments. Taxpayers can select a box on their income tax forms to contribute up to 0.5 percent of their taxes to the Catholic Church. In 2003, taxpayers contributed \$127.2 million (135 million euros) to the Catholic Church. In addition to voluntary taxpayer contributions, the Government provided the Catholic Church an additional \$33.6 million (28 million euros). This sum did not include state funding for religion teachers in public schools, military and hospital chaplains, and other indirect assistance. There will be no updates on public financing of the Catholic Church until 2006.

Representatives of Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic faiths signed bilateral agreements with the Government in 1992. Protestant entities signed the accord as the Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities of Spain (FEREDE); Jewish entities signed as the Federation of Israelite Communities of Spain (FCIE); and Islamic entities signed as the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE). The CIE is composed of two federations: the FEERI, the Federation of Spanish Islamic Entities, and the UCIDE, the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain. In 2003, the Government expanded the concept of "well-known deeply-rooted" beliefs (*notorio arraigo*) to allow other religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, to sign bilateral agreements. By the end of the period covered by this report, only the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had been granted *notorio arraigo*; however, the church has not negotiated a bilateral agreement with the Government.

Some autonomous regions have also signed agreements with religious groups in order to encourage social integration. For example, the Catalanian government has signed agreements with the Islamic Council of Catalonia, and Protestant, Jewish, and Baha'i religious communities. These agreements were social rather than financial in nature and were intended to encourage social integration.

National religious holidays include Epiphany (January 6), Holy Thursday and Good Friday, Assumption (August 15), All Saints' Day (November 1), Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas (December 25); some communities celebrate local religious holidays. National religious holidays do not have a negative effect on other religious groups. In the 1992 cooperation accords with the FCIE and CIE, the Government agreed to recognize Jewish and Muslim holidays. The 1992 accord with FEREDE accommodates Protestant entities, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, that celebrate Saturday as the Sabbath, by giving them Friday afternoon off from work with pay to prepare for the Sabbath.

The Law of Religious Freedom of 1980 implements the constitutional provision for freedom of religion. The 1980 law establishes a legal regime and certain privileges for religious organizations. To enjoy the benefits of this regime, religious organizations must be entered in the Register of Religious Entities maintained by the Office

of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice, which is updated regularly. To register with the Ministry of Justice, religious groups must submit documentation supporting their claim to be religions. If a group's application is rejected, it may appeal the decision to the courts. If it is judged not to be a religion, it may be included on a Register of Associations maintained by the Ministry of Interior. Inclusion on the Register of Associations grants legal status as authorized by the law regulating the right of association. Religions not officially recognized are treated as cultural associations.

The Church of Scientology has been refused registration as a religious entity in the country since it first applied in 1983. The decision to deny registration was upheld by a Supreme Court decision in 1990. An organization claiming to be affiliated with the Church of Scientology filed an application to register with the Ministry of Justice in 1983. The Justice Ministry also rejected this application. Following a 2001 decision by the Constitutional Court to register the Unification Church, and following the opening of a new national Church of Scientology of Spain, the Church filed an application again in October 2004. However, the Government denied the application in May 2005 and declined to register the Church on the grounds that the Ministry of Justice did not have the authority to overturn the 1990 decision of the Supreme Court through an administrative action. The Church has filed a Notice of Appeal to this denial.

Officials of the Church of Scientology argue that the organization that filed the 1983 application was not affiliated with the Church of Scientology. They also argue that the 1990 decision was based on provisions of law, overturned in a 2001 Constitutional Court decision, that a religion must worship a supreme being. Church officials argue that under the decision of the Constitutional Court, the Church should be registered. Ministry of Justice officials hold that the 2001 decision applied only to the Unification Church, and that the Church of Scientology must pursue the case through the court system. The Office of Religious Affairs found that the Church of Scientology held the same doctrine, organizational structure, and leadership as the organization that applied in 1983 and was denied registration at that time. Authorities declared that the Government would not interfere in any way with the activities of the Church of Scientology.

The first section of the Register of Religious Entities, called the "special section," contains a list of religious entities created by the Catholic Church, and a list of non-Catholic churches, denominations, and communities that have an agreement on cooperation with the State. Catholic dioceses and parishes are not required to register to gain benefits under the 1980 law. However, Catholic monasteries, religious communities, associations, and foundations may voluntarily register to participate in the legal regime.

In 2004, leaders of the Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish communities discussed the issue of expanded tax benefits and public funding, the opening of new places of worship, and the quality of religious education with the Office of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Justice; in particular, they sought public financing comparable to that enjoyed by the Catholic Church. All religious minority groups requested the Government to revise the national income tax form to allow taxpayers the option to donate a percentage of their taxes to non-Catholic entities. However, these negotiations ended without an agreement between the Government and religious leaders. In general, the Government places no legal restrictions on opening new places of worship; however, representatives of minority religious groups sometimes have difficulty opening places of worship, most frequently because of resistance from neighborhood groups.

Muslim and Protestant leaders also have called for the Government to provide more support for public religious education in their respective faiths. In 2004, the Government responded to these calls by approving legislation that provides funding for teachers of courses in Catholic, Islamic, evangelical/Christian, and Judaic studies in public school classes of 10 or more students. These courses are not mandatory. Those students who do not elect to take confessional courses are obliged to take an alternative course covering general social, cultural, and religious themes.

In 2004, the Government set aside funds to pay for 20 Muslim teachers to teach courses on Islam to public school students in Madrid, Catalonia, Andalusia, and Valencia. The Government required that the teachers hold degrees from a Spanish university, have training in Spanish law, and be fluent in Spanish. As of the end of the period covered by this report, courses on Islam were not yet being offered because government officials and members of the Islamic Commission of Spain had not selected Muslim teachers who met the qualifications.

There are religious schools for Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish students. There are no restrictions placed on parents who want to provide their children religious home school training or enroll them in private religious schools.

The Government has taken steps to promote interfaith understanding through the support or sponsorship of programs on interfaith dialogue. Members of all religious faiths serve as members of a government Committee of Advisors on Religious Freedom. On March 25, 2005, the Government participated in an interreligious seminar on "Religious Pluralism and Coexistence" in Madrid. It also sponsors university courses and seminars with representatives of different religious confessions. In 2005, the government held inter-religious roundtables at the University Menendez Pelayo of Santander and the University of Madrid. On June 8-9, 2005, the Government hosted a conference in Cordoba under the auspices of the Organization for European Security Cooperation on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance. The conference included representatives of all religious faiths as well as international experts on the subject of religious freedom. Government officials placed great emphasis specifically on the issue of anti-Semitism in the country and expressed interest in maintaining a regular dialogue with the U.S. Government on anti-Semitic activity in the country. The Government also appointed a special envoy to serve as a liaison between the Jewish community and international organizations dedicated to combating anti-Semitism in Europe, such as the forum for International Cooperation on Holocaust, Education, Remembrance, and Research in Warsaw.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Islamic and Protestant Federations continued to report that the building permit process for new mosque construction can be difficult and lengthy, especially for building sites in central urban locations. According to FEERI, new mosque construction sometimes was forced into less-visible suburban areas, primarily because of resistance from neighborhood groups. However, in 2003, the construction of a large and prominent mosque was completed in Granada. FEERI reported that female Muslim students who wear headscarves had not encountered problems with school dress codes. The Government has consistently held that the right to education takes priority over the enforcement of clothing regulations.

The Government funds Catholic chaplains for the military, prisons, and hospitals. The 1992 bilateral agreements recognize the right of Protestant and Muslim members of the armed forces to have access to religious services, subject to the needs of the service and authorization by their superiors. According to the agreements, such services are to be provided by ministers and imams approved by the religious federations and authorized by the military command. However, Protestant and Muslim leaders continued to report that there are no military regulations to implement the 1992 agreements. FERDE reported that evangelical military service personnel must leave their barracks to access chaplains and participate in evangelical religious services. Muslim leaders report that prison officials generally provide access for imams to visit Muslim prisoners, but officials have not granted permission for imams to hold religious services on prison grounds.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The growth of the country's immigrant population has at times led to social friction, which in isolated instances has had a religious component. Many citizens blame recent Moroccan immigrants for increased crime rates in the country. These beliefs sometimes result in anti-Muslim sentiment. There was no documented increase in violence toward Muslims following the March 2004 terrorist train bombings in Madrid. Muslim leaders have stated that Islamic communities continued to suffer from discrimination, particularly in obtaining employment and rental housing. They were concerned that media reports appeared to link Islam to the terrorist attacks. In February 2005, Sigma Dos, a private polling agency, conducted a national survey of 1000 individuals on attitudes on the Muslim population in the country. The poll revealed that 70 percent of those who responded had had no contact with Muslims, and 48 percent stated they knew almost nothing about Islam or Mus-

lims. Nevertheless, some 43 percent of respondents said the greatest threat of the presence of Muslims in the country was the possibility that fundamentalists would carry out a terrorist attack.

As in past years, in 2004 there were some reports of vandalism to Jewish community institutions in Barcelona, Toledo, and in Melilla. Barcelona, the capital of Catalonia, has an estimated population of 4,000 Jewish residents. A group of individuals painted anti-Semitic slogans in German on the walls of the ATID (Hebrew for "Future") community center and the Sephardi School in October 2004 in Barcelona. Following these incidents, the Catalan regional government temporarily provided additional security for community center and the school. In August 2004, unidentified persons defaced with red swastikas a statue in front of the El Transito Synagogue in Toledo. The local government later removed the graffiti and deployed local police to provide additional protection of Jewish historical sites. On a Jewish holy day in August 2004, local youth attacked a synagogue in Melilla with stones as worshippers celebrated the Prayer of Shabbat. No arrests were made in the incident. The Ministry of Justice expressed its concern about incidents of anti-Semitism, stating that these incidents appear to be isolated events attributed mostly to small groups of youth or immigrants.

Jewish community leaders also cited some incidents of anti-Semitic propaganda in the media and in local government institutions. The Catalan newspaper *El Periodico de Catalunya* published an article in November 2004 that described the deaths of Palestinians in the Middle East as acts of "extermination" by Israeli authorities. During the same month, a Star of David appeared placed side-by-side with swastika on a City Hall webpage in Barcelona. City officials removed the symbols without explaining why they were placed there or apologizing for the incident. Also in November 2004, in the region of Galicia in the northern part of the country, the mayor of the town of Oleiros approved public signs that described the Israeli Prime Minister as an "animal" and labeled members of his government "neo-Nazis." The Government responded by issuing a strong statement condemning the incident. The mayor later agreed to remove the signs.

Two Jewish synagogues in Barcelona belonging to the Jewish community of Barcelona and the ATID Jewish community were vandalized at various times in recent years and again in March 2005. The vandalism included anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of the synagogue. The groups also reported their belief that local extremist groups monitored them. The regional government responded by increasing security at the center.

In October 2004, partly in response to attacks against Jewish persons and institutions, the Council of Ministers approved a proposal from the Ministry of Justice calling for a Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence. In December 2004, the Government designated January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials also meet with religious leaders of various denominations.

The Embassy has facilitated exchanges between U.S. and local religious associations to foster dialogue and promote religious tolerance. The Embassy in Madrid and the Consulate in Barcelona have organized a Muslim outreach group to coordinate and promote increased contact with the Islamic community. This included inviting Islamic community leaders to special events, organized by the Embassy's U.S. Citizen Diplomat Program, and hosting meetings between Embassy officials and Muslim leaders. The Embassy has also met government officials to discuss attempts by the Church of Scientology to register.

SWEDEN

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 173,732 square miles, and its population is an estimated 9.0 million. Approximately 78.3 percent of the population belongs to the Church of Sweden. Since the Church and the State separated in 2000, increasing numbers of persons have left the Church each year. In 2004, 79,031 persons left the Church. According to studies carried out by the Church of Sweden, the main reason for persons leaving appears to be economic; membership carries a tax of 1.19 percent of members' incomes. In 2004, the Church of Sweden baptized 68.5 percent of children, a figure that has steadily declined over the past 2 decades. Confirmations have declined even more sharply; 37.6 percent of Swedish children were confirmed in 2004, as opposed to 80 percent in 1970.

There are an estimated 145,000 Roman Catholics, of whom 82,000 are registered with the Roman Catholic Church. Approximately 85 percent of Catholics are first or second generation immigrants, the largest groups coming from Southern Europe, Latin America, and Poland. Within the Stockholm Catholic Diocese, the Armenian, Chaldean, Maronite, Melchite, and Syrian churches celebrate Mass in their respective languages. Since the 1960s approximately 100 persons have converted to Catholicism annually.

The Orthodox Church has approximately 100,000 practicing members, and the main national Orthodox churches are Syrian, Serbian, Greek, Romanian, and Macedonian.

There is also a large Finnish-speaking Lutheran denomination.

While weekly services in Christian houses of worship generally are poorly attended, a large number of persons observe major festivals of the ecclesiastical year and prefer religious ceremonies to mark turning points in life such as weddings and funerals.

Those who attend Protestant churches, other than the Church of Sweden, total more than 400,000. The Pentecostal movement and the Missionary (or Missions) Church are the largest Protestant groups outside of the Church of Sweden. In 2004, the Pentecostal movement provided religious services to approximately 127,000 persons, of whom an estimated 90,000 were registered members. The 90,000 membership figure continues a steady decline from a peak of more than 100,000 in 1985. The Missionary Church provided services to approximately 129,000 members (registered and nonregistered).

The total number of Jews living in the country is estimated to be 18,500–20,000; however, the Jewish community estimates 10,000 active, or practicing, members. There are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewish synagogues, found mostly in the cities. Large numbers of Jews attend High Holy Day services but attendance at weekly services is low.

The major religious communities and the Church of Sweden are spread across the country. Large numbers of immigrants in recent decades have introduced various religions to the country, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and a number of Christian churches other than the Church of Sweden in those communities populated by immigrants. These communities tend to be concentrated in the larger cities.

Buddhists number approximately 15,000; Hindus between 7,000 and 10,000. There are estimated to be just over 1,000 Sikhs, and approximately 500 Zoroastrians. Reliable statistics on the number of atheists are not available; however, past estimates have placed the figure as high as 15 to 20 percent of the adult population.

The exact number of Muslims is difficult to estimate; however, it has increased rapidly through immigration in the past several years. The number provided by the Muslim community is approximately 350,000 members, of whom an estimated 100,000 are reportedly active. Muslim affiliations among immigrant groups are predominantly with the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam. There are mosques in many parts of the country.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has approximately 9,000 members.

A significant number of smaller, internationally active religious groups have also been established in the country but are viewed by the general public as lying outside of the mainstream. Such groups include the Church of Scientology (claiming to have approximately 3,000 members), Landmark-Forum, Hare Krishna, Word of Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses (approximately 23,000 members), and the Unification 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. The rights and freedoms enumerated in the Constitution include the rights to practice one's religion and protection of religious freedom. The laws concerning religious freedoms are observed and enforced at all government levels and by the courts in a non-discriminatory fashion. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private actors.

Since the separation of church and state in 2000, seven recognized religious denominations, in addition to the Church of Sweden, raise revenues through member-contributions made through the national tax system. All recognized denominations are entitled to direct government financial support, contributions made through the national tax system, or a mix of both. The State does not favor the Church of Sweden at the expense of other religious groups in any noticeable way. Since the population is predominantly Christian, certain Christian religious holy days are considered national holidays, but this does not appear to affect other religious groups negatively. School students from minority religious backgrounds are entitled to take relevant religious holidays.

No recognition or registration is required to carry out religious activity. Religious groups that want to receive government aid may apply for it. The Government considers the number of members in the group and its length of establishment, but applies no specific criteria.

Religious education covering all major world religions is compulsory in public schools. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools, all of which receive government subsidies, provided they adhere to government guidelines on core academic curriculum.

The Office of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination investigates claims of discrimination "due to race, skin color, national or ethnic origin, or religion." Discrimination on religious grounds is illegal, and specific legislation concerning the work place was introduced in 1999. In 2003, legislation concerning the provision of public and private services was enacted.

Following a 1998 public opinion poll that showed a low percentage of Swedish school children had even basic knowledge of the Holocaust, the Government launched nationwide Holocaust education projects. Approximately one million copies of the projects' core textbook are in circulation and available in many languages, at no cost, to every household with children.

In 2003, the Government established the Living History Forum, an official organization dedicated to promoting tolerance, democracy, and human rights using the Holocaust as a starting point. The Living History Forum, together with the Swedish Committee against Anti-Semitism, has planned a three-part educational program on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and Racism, to take place in the second half of 2005. Designed for teachers and others working in education, the program aims to establish a network of well educated and engaged individuals who can spread knowledge of the Holocaust.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding and meets annually with representatives from various religious groups. The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities (SST) is a government body consisting of 22 registered religious groups (37, including sub-groups) entitled to Government aid.

Many religious communities are involved in interfaith dialogue. However, in May 2004, the Jewish central council decided that the Jewish community should withdraw from official cooperation with the Church of Sweden after the launch of the Church's HOPP (HOPE) campaign for a just peace in the Middle East. Archbishop KG Hammar endorses the campaign, which includes a recommendation to boycott Israeli goods originating from occupied territory.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The law requires animal slaughter to be preceded by the administration of anesthetics to minimize undue suffering by the animal. The Jewish community has protested that this prevents the practice of kosher slaughter in the country, requiring kosher meat to be imported. The Muslim community appears to be split between those who feel certain anesthetic methods do not conflict with halal requirements, and those who feel that it does.

Since 2001, the law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, in the case of boys under the age of 2 months, in the presence of a person certified by the National Board of Health. Approximately 3,000 Muslim boys and 40 to 50 Jewish boys are circumcised each year. The National Board of Health has certified Jewish mohels (persons ordained to carry out circumcision according to the Jewish faith) to carry out the operations, but a medical doctor or an anesthesia nurse must accompany them. Some members of the Jewish and Muslim communities have protested against the law on the grounds that it interferes with their religious traditions. This law is scheduled for a mandatory review and evaluation in 2005.

Individuals serving in the military are given the time and opportunity to fulfill religious requirements. The military makes available food options fulfilling religious dietary requirements and allows time for appropriate mourning periods. Some regiments have an imam attached to them to facilitate religious observance by Muslim soldiers. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from national military service.

In 2003, the Home Guard (a rough equivalent to the National Guard in the USA) denied entry to a Muslim woman because of her use of a headscarf. As a result of this incident, the Office of the Ombudsman for Discrimination initiated a dialogue with the armed forces that resulted in new guidelines that allow the wearing of religious headwear. In 2005, a Sikh finished his military service, throughout which he wore a turban.

On June 27, 2005, the country's "Svenska Dagbladet" newspaper reported that the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination was suing Gothenburg city for two instances where Muslim women were turned away at a swimming pool because they were wearing arm-length tops. Pool employees maintain the clothing violated pool regulations. One of the women believed that she was turned away because she was wearing a veil. The Ombudsman has requested approximately \$19,230 (150,000 SEK) in compensation for each of the women.

In July 2004, Pentecostal Pastor Ake Green was convicted and sentenced to 1 month imprisonment under a hate-speech law that criminalizes agitation against ethnic groups. Green's conviction resulted from a sermon in which he condemned homosexuality, in part on the basis of biblical teachings. Green challenged the verdict on the basis of freedom of speech, and in February 2005 an appeals court ruled in Green's favor and overturned the conviction. In March 2005, the Prosecutor General announced the Government's intention to pursue the case against Green in the Supreme Court. In May 2005, the Supreme Court accepted the case, which it expects to hear later in the year.

In April 2005, a district court in Stenungsund sentenced a man to 2 months of imprisonment for hate-speech towards homosexuals and for violating a law governing on-line website content. The individual had posted on-line material that was judged to be offensive toward homosexuals. The individual appealed the conviction, arguing that the on-line content reflected his Christian convictions. As of June 2005, the appeal was pending.

Three trade unions and the Employers' Association agreed in April 2005 on compensatory holiday leave hours that will allow non-Christians to substitute their religious holy days for Christian holy days that are also national holidays.

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 have been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Citizens are tolerant of diverse religious practitioners. However, some anti-Semitism exists, which occasionally takes the form of vandalism or assault. It also appears that Muslims are sometimes subject to societal discrimination. Swedish law enforcement maintains statistics on hate crimes but does not break the figures down by categories relating to the targeting of specific religious groups, with the exception of anti-Semitic attacks. There are inadequate figures on incidents or crimes motivated by religious prejudice or intolerance towards members of the Muslim community. The Office of the Ombudsman for Discrimination received reports of discrimination on religious grounds, including religious affiliation, during the period covered by this report. Exact statistics are not available.

The number of reported anti-Semitic crimes has increased since the end of the nineties, and averaged approximately 130 annually during the period 2000–03, with 128 crimes reported in 2003. The largest single category of anti-Semitic crime in 2003 was agitation against an ethnic group with 52 reported incidents, and unlawful threat/molestation second with 35 reported incidents. There were three reported cases of assault during the same period. Some Jews believe that increases in attacks are directly linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and increased tensions in the Middle East at large. Since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000, the Jewish Community in the country no longer sees its primary threats coming from neo-Nazis but from Islamic and leftist extremists.

In 2003, four young persons of Arabic origin broke into a Jewish-owned shop in Malmö, shouting anti-Semitic epithets and threats, after which they attacked the shop owner and another Jew. The shop owner was sent to hospital for treatment. Two weeks earlier, Muslims had thrown stones at employees of the Jewish Burial Society at the Jewish cemetery in Malmö. In June 2004, a football match between a Jewish and predominantly Muslim Somali youth team ended with the Jewish players being attacked by Muslim Somali players. More recent examples of anti-Semitic incidents include the harassment for being “from Israel” of a Jew at a commercial establishment in Stockholm in December 2004, and the burning of a swastika at a Jewish burial site in Norrköping in January 2005.

In 2003, the Islamic Center in Malmö in the southern part of the country, which includes a mosque, community center, and school, was seriously damaged in an arson attack.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The Embassy maintains regular contacts with local religious leaders, and Embassy officials have participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance. The Embassy has also nominated individuals to participate in International Visitor programs on religious diversity.

SWITZERLAND

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. However, negative reaction to immigration, the conflict in the Middle East, and terrorist acts by Muslim extremists in foreign countries, have increased intolerance in radical and populist publications and occasionally in mainstream daily newspapers.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 15,942 square miles, and its population is an estimated 7.21 million. Three-quarters of the population nominally adhere to either the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches, but actual church attendance rates are much lower. The Muslim population is the largest religious minority, making up approximately 4 percent of the resident population. More than 11 percent of citizens claim no formal allegiance to any church or religious community.

The breakdown between the different religious denominations has shifted noticeably over the past several years. Traditionally, more than 95 percent of the population had been split evenly between the Swiss Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church, but since the 1970s, there has been a steady increase of persons formally renouncing their church membership. In the Roman Catholic Church, immigration from southern Europe has countered this trend. The arrival of immigrants from other areas has contributed to the noticeable growth of religious communities that had little presence in the country in the past. According to the Gov-

ernment's Statistics Office, membership in religious denominations is as follows: 41.8 percent Roman Catholic; 33.0 percent Protestant; 1.8 percent Orthodox; 0.2 percent Old Catholic; 0.2 percent other Christian groups; 4.3 percent Muslim; 0.2 percent Jewish; 0.8 percent other religions (Buddhist, Hindu, and other); 11.1 percent possess no formal creed.

According to official statistics, the Muslim population has doubled to more than 310,000 over the past several years. Muslim immigrants from North African countries typically settled in the French-speaking western part of the country, whereas those arriving from Turkey, Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia commonly relocated in the German-speaking eastern and central parts. There are only two major mosques, one in Zurich (built in 1963 and belonging to the Ahmadayia movement) and one in Geneva (built in 1978 and financed by Saudi Arabia). There are approximately 120 Muslim centers located throughout the country in private homes or office complexes.

Approximately three-quarters of the Jewish households are located in the urban areas of four major cities: Zurich, Geneva, Basel, and Bern. There are four distinguishable Jewish subgroups: orthodox; conservative; liberal; and reform. An estimated 15 percent of Jews belong to the Orthodox branch.

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.

Article 15 of the Constitution provides for freedom of creed and conscience, and the Federal Penal Code prohibits any form of debasement or discrimination of any religion or any religious adherents.

There is no official state church; religious matters are handled by the cantons, according to Article 72 of the Constitution. Most of the 26 cantons (with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel, where church and state are separated) financially support at least one of the three traditional communities—Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, or Protestant—with funds collected through taxation. Each canton has its own regulations regarding the relationship between Church and State. In some cantons, the church tax is voluntary, but in others an individual who chooses not to contribute to church tax may have to leave the church formally. In some cantons, private companies are unable to avoid payment of the church tax. Some cantons grant “church taxation” status, which the traditional three Christian communities enjoy, to the Jewish community. Islamic and other nonofficial religious groups are excluded from these benefits.

On February 27, 2005, voters in Zurich canton comfortably adopted a new Cantonal Constitution that grants the three traditional Christian communities greater autonomy in regulating their internal affairs. The new Constitution also grants official recognition to two local Jewish communities but does not provide for the raising of funds through taxation as with the three Christian communities. Neither does the new Constitution provide for the official recognition of Islam or other religious communities. Previously in 2003, voters had rejected an amendment to the old Cantonal Constitution that would have provided for the recognition of nontraditional religious communities and allowed them to levy a tax on their members and to receive public funds. According to a local polling institute, the main reason for the amendment's defeat at the polls was its provisions for granting Islam recognition as an official religion under cantonal law.

A religious organization must register with the Government in order to receive tax-exempt status.

In May 2004, the Federal Council (cabinet) decided to appoint an ambassador to the Vatican in order to establish full diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Although a Papal Nuncio has resided in Bern since 1920, the country appointed an ambassador-at-large “in special mission” to the Holy See only in 1991.

Groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize. Foreign missionaries must obtain a “religious worker” visa to work in the country. Visa requirements include proof that the foreigner would not displace a citizen from doing the job, has formally completed theological training, and would be supported financially by the host organization. The host organization has to acknowledge the Swiss legal order and must not tolerate its abuse by its members neither in theory nor in practice. At the end of 2004, there were 13 ordained clergymen, and 85 non-ordained religious employees working on short-term permits in the country.

Religious education is taught in most public cantonal schools, with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel. Classes in Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrine are

normally offered, but some schools cover other religious groups living in the country. In Lucerne canton, two municipalities have offered religious classes in Muslim doctrine since 2002. In some cantons religious classes are entirely voluntary, but in others they form part of the curriculum, although waivers are routinely granted to children of parents who request them. Those of different faiths are free to attend classes for their own creeds during the class period. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by their church, or they may teach their children at home.

Recently a number of cantons have reformed religious education in public schools to either complement or entirely supplant traditional classes in Christian doctrine with non-confessional teachings about religion and culture. French-speaking primary schools in Fribourg, Vaud, Wallis, Jura, and Bern have adopted a new religious tutorial that gives prominent coverage to non-Christian denominations as well. In Wallis, opponents of the new tutorial filed a petition with the local parliament to stop its introduction, but after additional consultations, the cantonal government confirmed its use in primary schools beginning school year 2004–05. In the central part of the country, authorities in a number of cantons decided to complement religious classes being offered by the individual religious communities with secular teachings about ethics and religion. In Zurich, the government's board of public education in August 2004 decided to introduce a new subject, Religion and Culture, to secondary schools, which would expose pupils to all major religious traditions with no precedence given to any one of them. By exposing pupils to different religious traditions, authorities hope to foster inter-confessional understanding and tolerance in a multi-cultural society. Textbooks and the curriculum are being drafted and the training of lay teachers is being prepared. Classes are scheduled to begin in school year 2007–08. The Canton of Basel is contemplating similar steps but has not yet taken any firm decisions. In virtually all cantons contemplating or implementing reform, authorities plan to make the non-confessional teachings about religion and culture a non-elective part of the curriculum for all pupils.

The debate over the country's World War II record contributed to the problem of anti-Semitism. To counter anti-Semitism and racism, the Federal Department of the Interior set up, in 2001, a Federal Service for the Combating of Racism to coordinate antiracism activities of the Federal Administration with cantonal and communal authorities. This Federal Service manages a project fund of \$11.1 million (15 million Swiss francs) to use over a 5-year period. By the end of 2004, the Federal Service had supported over 400 projects to combat racism, including some projects specifically addressing the problem of anti-Semitism. The Federal Service for the Combating of Racism will continue to support anti-racism activities after the project fund expires at the end of 2005 but only dispose an annual budget of \$900,000.

Of the 14 political parties represented in the Federal Parliament, only 4 (the Christian Democratic Party, the Evangelical People's Party, the Federal Democratic Union, and the Christian Social Party) subscribe to a religious philosophy. There have been no reports of individuals being excluded from a political party because of their religious beliefs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There have been several reports of Swiss authorities taking measures to prevent or stop Muslim clerics from spreading religious notions that clash with basic precepts of the Swiss legal order.

The Federal Office of Migration in a precedent case rejected the 2003 work permit applications for two Islamic clerics that the Islamic Center in Geneva had filed with local authorities, because of the extremist views of the Islamic Center's leader, Hani Ramadan. The decision was appealed to the Justice Ministry's appeals body and remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In November 2004, Basel authorities asked a Muslim imam to depart the country after learning that the Saudi national in a local Muslim school had justified some form of domestic violence based on teachings of the Koran. Basel follows a zero-tolerance policy regarding the interpretation in public of religious texts that violate the Swiss Constitution or federal or cantonal law.

In May 2005, a Geneva administrative court ordered the Cantonal Government to recognize Hani Ramadan's status as public servant and resume paying his salary. Ramadan had been suspended from his duties as public school teacher in the fall of 2002 following the publication of an article in the French newspaper "Le Monde" in which he favored the stoning of adulterers as set out in Islamic law (Shari'a). Ramadan, who heads the Islamic Center in Geneva, was dismissed in 2003 following an administrative investigation but he successfully appealed the decision. However,

following a second investigation, the Geneva Cantonal Government, confirmed Ramadan's dismissal and removed him from the cantonal payroll in December 2004. The Cantonal Government stated its intention to honor the administrative court ruling but not to re-instate Ramadan in his former teaching duties.

The European Court of Human Rights has upheld the Canton of Geneva's decision to prohibit a Muslim primary school teacher from wearing a headscarf in the classroom. The Court found that the legal provisions did not discriminate against the religious convictions of the complainant, but were meant to protect the rights of other subjects as well as the public order.

Ritual slaughter (the bleeding to death of animals that have not been stunned first) has been banned in the country since 1893, but the 1978 Law on the Protection of Animals explicitly allows for the importation of kosher and halal meat. Imported kosher and halal meat from France and Germany is available in the country at comparable prices. A popular initiative to protect animal rights that if passed would prohibit the import of meat from animals bled without stunning was filed in 2003. In June 2004, the government negatively reviewed the initiative as a potential violation of the European Convention of Human Rights. Parliament has followed the government and recommended rejection of the popular initiative in the pending national poll.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

The country participated in the April 2004 conference sponsored by the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on anti-Semitism in Berlin. Franz von Däniken, the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, highlighted the various ways the country was confronting anti-Semitism. He condemned all forms of racism and anti-Semitism and fully endorsed the OSCE measures to promote tolerance and nondiscrimination.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

In July 2004, senior leaders of the country's Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities met in Bern to engage in interfaith dialogue and to discuss common problems. One of the items discussed was the controversy surrounding the public display of religious symbols. The religious leaders also created plans to establish a permanent platform for interfaith dialogue to further mutual trust and respect among religions.

On January 23, 2005, representatives of ten Christian denominations in the country signed the Charta Oecumenica, an ecumenical charter on closer cooperation in Europe, after a televised inter-confessional service in the church of St Ursanne in northwestern Switzerland. The text of the charter, which was drawn up in 2001 by representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions, mentions the need for Christian unity in Europe and aims at a common approach to spreading the Christian faith. However, in November 2004, the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches had instructed its ministers not to administer Holy Communion jointly with Roman Catholic clergy. The recommendation came only months after the Vatican's instruction "Redemptionis Sacramentum," which reaffirmed the exclusion of non-Catholics from the celebration of Holy Communion.

The Swiss Observatory of Religions based in Lausanne believes that anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic feelings have increased over the last decade. In a statement following the arson attack on the Lugano synagogue, the Federal Commission against Racism observed that the climate against members of religious minorities and their institutions has deteriorated in general. Although physical violence was rare, most anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim remarks have largely been fueled by extensive media reports over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Holocaust Assets issue, and terrorist acts by Muslim extremists in foreign countries.

During the night of March 13/14, 2005, two arson attacks were launched in the city of Lugano in the southern canton of Ticino against the synagogue and a cloth-

ing store owned by a Jewish family. The blazes completely destroyed the clothing store and severely damaged the ground floor beneath the main sanctuary of the synagogue, ravaging most of its library holdings, and causing damages of 300,000 Swiss francs. No one was hurt in either incident. Police later arrested a middle-aged Italian national with a mental condition who confessed to the arson attacks; his claim was supported by DNA evidence. Four days after the arrest, the Ticino cantonal prosecutor publicly stated that the perpetrator had acted alone without any apparent connection to other individuals and ruled out overtly anti-Semitic motives for the two arson attacks. She pointed out that the suspect had committed a third arson attack the same night that appeared to have no religious connotation. The Ticino prosecutor's comments caused a minor storm of indignation among out-of-canton Jewish groups and religious freedom advocates, who doubted the alleged absence of anti-Semitic motives. The psychiatric evaluation later corroborated that the suspect had not acted out of anti-Semitic motives but had been settling personal scores.

The arson attack in Lugano was the first time in living memory that a house of worship had been set ablaze in the country; recent attacks on Swiss synagogues had been restricted to acts of vandalism and anti-Semitic graffiti smeared on walls. A day later, Swiss president Samuel Schmid attended the inauguration of the new museum at Israel's Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem, condemned the arson attacks and pledged Government support for the investigation and in fighting anti-Semitism in general. On March 17 2005, a sizeable group of over 1000 people, including representatives of all major religious communities, gathered in Lugano to express their support for the Jewish community and to condemn the attacks.

On the night of April 16/17, 2005, vandals spray-painted anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls and on a Holocaust memorial just outside of the Grand Synagogue in Geneva. Cantonal authorities condemned the vandalism and opened an investigation. In mid-May, unknown vandals desecrated a dozen tombs of the cemetery of the Jewish community of Vevey-Montreux, where several survivors of the Holocaust who later found refuge in Vevey are buried. This third attack on a highly visible Jewish target worried Jewish groups, who expressed hope that the culprits will soon be apprehended and punished.

From 2003 to December 2004, the Geneva-based Intercommunity Center for Coordination against anti-Semitism and Defamation recorded 34 acts of anti-Semitism in the western half of the country, ranging from verbal and written assaults to offensive graffiti and acts of vandalism against Jewish property. The president of the Swiss Confederation of Jewish Communities stated that violent acts against members of the Jewish community and Jewish property had increased over the past decade.

In his radio and television address on May 8, 2005 commemorating the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, President Schmid stated that it behooves each and every one to resolutely oppose all totalitarian and extremist endeavors as well as all forms of racism or anti-Semitism.

The national referendum campaign on two constitutional amendments to facilitate the naturalization of second- and third-generation immigrants carried racist and anti-Islamist undertones. Opponents of easing restrictions on granting Swiss citizenship ran a controversial advertisement that by using extrapolated population figures suggested that the Muslim community would double in size every 10 years and the country hence become a majority Muslim country by 2040. The electorate rejected both constitutional amendments in September 2004.

In the Federal Parliament, the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC), nominally the strongest faction, tabled two motions to abolish the Federal Commission against Racism and to erase the anti-racism clause from the federal Penal Code, which criminalizes racist or anti-Semitic action or expression, whether in public speech or in printed material. Both motions have yet to be debated in Parliament.

According to statistics gathered by the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, the total of reported incidents against foreigners or minorities was 101 in 2004, down from 111 incidents recorded in 2003. These figures include instances of verbal and written attacks, which were much more frequent than physical assaults.

In March 2004, a study released by the Zurich University found no evidence of anti-Semitism in the country's German language media, but noted that newspapers and electronic media often resorted to questionable stereotypes. The study also said that Muslims were more likely to be portrayed as aggressors and as uneducated people who are opposed to democracy. The report was based on a survey of the media in the German-speaking part of the country.

In April 2004, the Zurich lawyer and honorary chairman of the Jewish religious community, Sigi Feigel, sued the political party Europa Partei Schweiz, claiming that it sponsored newspaper advertisements comparing Israel to Nazi Germany. The

party, which is not represented in Parliament, ran advertisements in the daily "Tages-Anzeiger" the day after the killing of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi calling on the country to cut off diplomatic relations and end military cooperation with Israel. The advertisements referred to "Israel, nation of the Jews" and stated, "with the exception of the gas chambers, all the Nazi instruments are being used against (Israel's) resident population." The case remained pending before the cantonal prosecutor at the end of the period covered by this report.

On January 27, 2005, schools across the country held a day of remembrance for victims of the Holocaust. Attendance rates remained mixed but activities significantly increased compared to the first commemoration in 2004. Education authorities said the aim was to remember the Holocaust and other forms of genocide committed in the past century and raise awareness of inhumane ideologies.

Fear of radical Islam in the country was reflected in various media reports on supposed radical Islamic rhetoric in mosques. Many imams in the country come from Kosovo, Bosnia, the Middle East, or Maghreb countries. They are often self-taught persons or trained in Muslim countries, mainly Saudi Arabia. Officially, the country has two large mosques, in Geneva and Zurich, and approximately 120 prayer rooms. It is believed that another 100 rooms exist, many of which belong to the Albanian, Turkish, or Arab communities and are controlled by imams under Salafist influence, which escape tight federal and cantonal control. Prayer rooms are legal as long as they do not provide personnel or financing to terrorist networks. Religious associations are required to register only if their earnings reach approximately \$74,000.

On October 8, 2004, a 45 year-old African national entered the Islamic Center in Lausanne during Friday prayers and attacked the imam with a knife, seriously injuring him and a nearby worshiper in the stomach. The assailant had the knife taped to his hand, and in the ensuing scuffle injured another six persons, including himself, before he could be overwhelmed by by-standers and apprehended by the police. According to police, the assailant had escaped from a hospital where he was undergoing psychiatric evaluations. Vaud judicial authorities opened an investigation that remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

There have been several reports of resident members of the Muslim community expressing concern or alerting Swiss authorities of foreign imams giving radical speeches in mosques or local prayer rooms. The Muslim imam asked to depart from Basel canton in November 2004 for justifying some form of domestic violence was denounced by members of the local Muslim community. The former imam of the Islamic Center in Zurich, Youssef Ibram, stated that the storm of indignation following an interview with a Swiss-French magazine of November 2004, in which he refused to take an unequivocal stance against the stoning of adulterers damaged his relations with the leadership of the community and left him no choice but to resign from his position. In April 2004, Swiss Muslims in Geneva complained that foreign imams invited to the Great Mosque of Geneva for a prayer were giving radical speeches, sometimes filled with invective against the Jewish population and western countries.

In June 2005, the local Association of Muslim Organizations in Zurich made public a charter adopted in March committing its 15 member societies to uphold the established legal order and democracy. The charter calls for the peaceful coexistence of and dialogue between different cultures and religions, rejects violence, and demands respect for human rights and equality. The charter calls on members of the Muslim communities to integrate themselves into society and become actively engaged for the common good.

Efforts to set up a training program in the country for Muslim clerics and religious teachers took a step forward in Basel, where cantonal authorities and the local university plan to establish a chair for Muslim history and theology. In 2004 the university held exploratory talks with the Vienna-based Academy for Islamic Religious Education, but private financing for the chair has not yet been assured. In November 2004 the Conference of Swiss Bishops and the Swiss Protestant Church Federation both publicly endorsed the idea that imams who lead prayers in Swiss mosques should be trained at Swiss universities. However, the Federal Council (cabinet) cautioned that the training for a specific profession was not a priority at the university level.

The Federal Office of Migration has acknowledged that the training of imams poses a problem. Some cantons refused to grant a residency permit to imams considered fundamentalists. An updated version of the Law on Foreigners, being debated in Parliament at the end of the period covered by this report, will provide for mandatory training for immigrant clerics in order to facilitate their integration in society. Among other provisions, the training program will ensure that immigrants can speak at least one of the three national languages (French, German, or Italian).

While Muslim and Jewish cemeteries already exist in the country, two laic cantons (Geneva and Neuchatel) require that all individuals from religious communities be buried in state-owned cemeteries only. Both Jewish and Muslim communities have protested that this restriction breaches their freedom of religion and incurs higher costs. Islam prohibits Muslims from being buried in cemeteries with those of other religions, and Geneva Muslims protest that they are forced to pay expensive repatriation costs to send their deceased by plane to a Muslim country. It is estimated that between 90 and 95 percent of deceased Muslims in Geneva are sent to their countries of origin for burial.

Other religious customs such as genital mutilation of children, forced marriage, or “repudiation” of a marriage are illegal.

In April 2004, Muslim leaders expressed fears of a “witch-hunt” against the community, following government revelations that members of half a dozen militant Muslim groups are operating secretly in the country. These fears were increased in January 2004, when police arrested eight foreign nationals suspected of links to 2003 terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia. The Federal Refugee Office (FRO) later confirmed press allegations that these radical Islamic groups included the Tunisian Islamic Front, the Palestinian militant Islamic group Hamas, and Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front. The FRO admitted that the Government had become more sensitive to potential threats in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, but denied that the authorities were involved in any systematic targeting of the country’s Muslims.

There were no reports of difficulties for Muslims buying or renting space to worship but some Islamic centers continued having difficulties accommodating the growing number of faithful attending Friday’s prayers. Although occasional complaints arise, such as a Muslim employee not being given time to pray during the workday, attitudes generally are tolerant toward Muslims. In one poll from November 2004, 76 percent of Swiss residents surveyed did not feel threatened by the presence of the 300,000-strong Muslim community living in the country, as opposed to 16 percent who did feel threatened. 61 percent favored a university chair to form Islamic imams in Switzerland and 53 percent approved of female members of the Muslim community wearing the headscarf to work. In a separate survey of the Muslim community living in the country, 84 percent of the respondents said they felt accepted in the country, with 79 percent declaring they have never been discriminated against because of their religion.

The place of the Islamic headscarf in Swiss society was an issue of public debate. The country’s biggest retailer made headlines in October 2004 when it became public that it had put on hold a request made in August by one of its female employees at a Zurich store to wear her headscarf to work. The retailer in November 2004 granted the request, stating that it would not impose a general ban but decide each case on individual merits. The second biggest retailer, on the other hand, announced that its dress code did not provide for any headgear and that it would hence not allow the wearing of the headscarf. In Basel, the candidacy of a young woman in the October 2004 elections to the cantonal parliament who publicly affirmed her intention to continue to wear the headscarf if elected re-kindled the debate over the headscarf in public office. In November 2004, a local conservative party launched a popular initiative to ban all public sector employees or holders of public office from wearing the headscarf on duty. Federal Councilor Moritz Leuenberger publicly opposed an outright ban of the headscarf and warned that such a ban could hamper integration of Muslim women in Swiss society.

Many nongovernmental organizations coordinate interfaith events throughout the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with government officials and representatives of the various faiths.

TAJIKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some areas of concern.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Government policies reflect a concern about Islamic ex-

tremism, a concern shared by much of the general population. The Government monitors the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political. As opposed to last year, there were no mosque closures during the period of this report, although the Committee on Religious Affairs did publicly announce that a number of unregistered mosques operate in the country. In contrast to previous years, the State Committee on Religious Affairs (SRCA) removed no imams from mosques. The Government, including President Emomali Rahmonov, continued to enunciate a policy of active secularism, which it tends to define in anti-extremist rather than in religious terms.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some minority religious groups continued to experience local harassment during the period covered by this report. Some mainstream Muslim leaders occasionally expressed concern through sermons and press articles that minority religious groups undermine national unity.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy has promoted a message of tolerance not only among, but also within, faiths through public diplomacy efforts. In addition, the Ambassador meets regularly with community leaders of different confessions and the United States has provided computers and internet access for the country's Islamic University. Embassy staff investigate instances of potential discrimination and advocate strongly for Government tolerance of all faiths.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,300 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.8 million, although it is difficult to determine an accurate figure due to lack of registration of births in some rural areas. An estimated 95 percent of citizens consider themselves Muslims, although the degree of religious observance varies widely. Overall, active observance of Islam appears to be increasing. An estimated 30 to 40 percent of the rural population and 5 to 10 percent of the urban population regularly follow Muslim practices or attend services at mosques. The number of Muslims who fast during the holy month of Ramadan is high; up to 99 percent of Muslims in the countryside and 70 percent in the cities fasted during the latest month of Ramadan. Approximately 7 percent of all Muslims are Shi'a, 40 percent of whom are Ismailis. Most of them reside in the remote Gorno-Badakhshan region as well as certain districts of the southern Khatlon region and in Dushanbe. Most other Muslim inhabitants (approximately 90 percent) are Sunni.

There are approximately 230,000 Christians, mostly ethnic Russians and other Soviet-era immigrant groups. The largest Christian group is Russian Orthodox, but there also are registered organizations of Baptists (five), Roman Catholics (two), Seventh-day Adventists (one), Korean Protestants, which includes the Grace SunMin Church (two), Jehovah's Witnesses (one), and Lutherans (no data available). Other religious minorities are very small and include Baha'is (four registered organizations), Zoroastrians (no data available), Hare Krishnas (one), and Jews (one). Each of these groups is estimated to total less than 1 percent of the population. The overwhelming majority of these small groups live in the capital or other large cities. There are no accurate data on atheists in the country, but it is estimated that 0.01 percent of the population is atheist or does not belong to any confession.

Christian missionaries from Western countries, Korea, India, and elsewhere are present, but their numbers are quite small. The SCRA estimates the number of Christian converts since independence at approximately 2,000–3,000 persons, reflecting some increase since 2004. Some small groups of Islamic missionaries from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern states also visited the country during the period covered by this report.

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 Government monitors the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political or espousing "extremist tendencies," and some parts of local administration misinterpret the term "secular state" as involving a bias against religion.

The extremist Islamist political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) is banned and its members are subject to arrest and imprisonment for subversion. HT promotes hate and praises acts of terrorism, although it maintains that it is committed to

nonviolence. The party's virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western literature calls for the overthrow of secular governments, including those in Central Asia, to be replaced with a world-wide Islamic government called the Caliphate. Because HT is primarily a political, not a religious, organization and because of its encouragement of terrorism, authorities' actions to restrict HT and prosecute HT in accordance with international legal norms are not a restriction on religious freedom, *per se*.

Although there is no official state religion, the Government recognizes two Islamic holy days, Id Al-Fitr and Idi Qurbon (Eid al-Adha in Arabic), as state holidays.

According to the Law on Religion and Religious Organizations, religious communities must be registered by the State Committee on Religious Affairs (SCRA), which is under the Council of Ministers and monitors the activities of all religious establishments. While the official justification for registration is to ensure that religious groups act in accordance with the law, the practical purpose is to ensure that they do not become overtly political. To register with the SCRA, a national religious group must submit a charter, a list of at least 10 members, and evidence of local government approval of the location of a house of worship, if one exists. Religious groups are not required to have a physical structure in order to register, but they cannot hold regular meetings without one. Individual believers—up to 10 persons—do not have to register with the SCRA in order to worship privately.

Responsibility for registration of neighborhood mosques is divided between the SCRA and local authorities, who must agree on the physical location of a given mosque. The SCRA is the primary authority for registration of non-Muslim groups; however, these religious groups must also register their place of worship with local authorities. According to the SCRA, local authorities may object to the registration of a place of worship only if the proposed structure does not meet with sanitation or building codes, or if it is located on public land or immediately adjacent to government buildings, schools, or other places of worship. If the local government objects to a proposal, the Government is required to suggest an alternative. In the absence of registration, local authorities can force the closure of a place of worship and members can be fined administratively. There were no cases of SCRA refusal to register religious groups during the period covered by this report nor were there reports of groups that did not apply for registration out of a belief that it would not be granted. However, there were isolated cases of local government refusal to register religious groups in their areas, such as in the city of Tursonzade, where officials demanded local registration for a branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses in addition to their registration with the SCRA.

Approximately 2,800 mosques are registered for daily prayers. So-called "Friday mosques" (large facilities built for Friday prayers) must be registered with the SCRA. There are 228 such mosques registered, not including Ismaili places of worship. Only one such mosque is authorized per 15,000 residents in a given geographic area. Many observers contend that this is discriminatory because no such rule exists for other faiths.

During the period covered by this report, President Rahmonov continued to strongly defend "secularism," a politicized term that carries the strong connotation of being "anti-extremist" rather than "nonreligious." In national speeches, the President cautioned against outsiders unfairly linking Islam to terrorism. While the vast majority of citizens consider themselves Muslims and are not anti-Islamic, there is a significant fear of Islamic extremism, both in the government and among the population at large.

A 1999 constitutional amendment permits religiously based political parties, although a 1998 law specifying that parties may not receive support from religious institutions remained in effect. Two representatives from a religiously oriented party, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT), were members in the Lower House of the National Parliament during the period covered by this report. There also were several deputies from the IRPT in regional and district parliaments around the country. The Government incorporated the IRPT in 1997 at the end of the civil war and is the only legal Islamic political party in Central Asia.

An executive decree generally prohibits Government publishing houses from publishing anything in Arabic script, but they have done so in special cases. They generally also do not publish religious literature, but have done so on occasion, including copies of the Qur'an. There are small private publishers that publish Islamic materials without serious problems. There is no restriction on the distribution or possession of the Qur'an, the Bible, or other religious works. There were no reported restrictions on religious-oriented press.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Official Government policy contributed generally to the free practice of religion, but local governments sometimes misapplied these policies. The Government did not

explicitly ban, prohibit, or discourage specific religions; however, local authorities in some cases used the registration requirement in an attempt to prevent the activity of some groups.

The SCRA controlled participation in the Hajj and continued restrictions on pilgrims undertaking the hajj during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to require air travel for the Hajj, citing hygiene and safety concerns regarding other means of travel. As a result, the number of hajjis decreased to 4,072 in 2005 from approximately 5,000 in 2004.

The local government of Tursonzade used administrative barriers to the registration of a place of worship for the Jehovah's Witnesses, in spite of their national registration. The SCRA intervened on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but the city administration had not registered the Jehovah's Witnesses by the end of the period covered by this report.

In August 2004, the Government allegedly used the Council of Ulamo, an ostensibly nongovernmental body that monitors and standardizes Islamic teaching, to pass a fatwa prohibiting women from entering mosques that did not have completely separate facilities for men and women. This is considered by some to be more of a political move than a religious move, since it reduces the access women have to IRPT messages, and allows the Government to monitor with fewer agents the discussions that go on in mosques. There were reports that some local officials have forbidden members of the IRPT to speak in mosques in their region. However, this restriction is more a reflection of political rather than religious differences.

Beginning in August 2002, the Government required all mosques to reregister with local authorities and the SCRA. Approximately 750 mosques were closed for failing to comply with this requirement, although many remained open as "tea-houses" or other public facilities where observant Muslims went to talk and pray. The Government is no longer actively pursuing a registration campaign, but did announce that at least 26 mosques in different areas were operating without registration.

There were unconfirmed reports that in some cases, local government officials have forbidden Muslim women from having their photograph taken for an internal identification document while wearing the hijab, and that some schools prohibited girls from attending while wearing a hijab. The SCRA claims that this occurs rarely, and that they have interceded with the identification agencies in each case to make an exception. Reportedly, this is attributable to overzealous interpretation of what it means to be a secular country. In October 2004, officials refused to issue passports to approximately 100 women in Isfara who did not want to be photographed without a hijab.

Missionaries of registered religious groups are not restricted by law, and they continued to proselytize openly. Missionaries are not particularly welcomed by some local communities, and some religious groups experienced harassment in response to evangelical activities. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of visa restrictions for Muslim missionaries.

The "ban" on printing in Arabic script is thought to be an attempt to prevent the publication of extremist literature, such as flyers circulated by the extremist Islamic political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Authorities in Isfara continued to restrict private Arabic language schools (to include restrictions on private Islamic instruction) stemming from past reports that one such school was hosting a suspected terrorist. Restrictions on home-based Islamic instruction remained in place. While these restrictions were primarily due to political concerns, they affected religious instruction.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, there were no reported cases of government officials harassing observant Muslims under the guise of combating extremist Hizb ut-Tahrir activities.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of arrests of high-profile Muslims, such as the 2003 arrest and sentencing of the IRPT's Deputy Chairman, Shamsiddin Shamsiddinov. The IRPT stated that this arrest was politically motivated, but did not allege it was part of a larger government campaign against 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In contrast to previous years, the SCRA did not conduct an “attestation,” or examination of imams, which many observers maintained had been a way to control politically outspoken religious figures. During the period covered by this report, the SCRA did not remove any imams from their posts.

Gradually throughout the reporting period, officials suspended 2001 prohibitions issued by the mayors’ offices in Dushanbe and certain areas of the Khatlon and Sughd regions against the use of loudspeakers for the daily call to prayer. These prohibitions were apparently not based on any central directive. The Government also responded when the Embassy expressed concern over its actions with regards to the Jehovah’s Witnesses registration, and has been a willing partner in resolving the issue.

In contrast to previous years, no religious groups reported administrative difficulties with their places of worship during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Conflict between different religious groups virtually is unknown, in part because there are so few non-Muslims. However, some Muslim leaders occasionally expressed concern that minority religious groups undermine national unity and complained that current laws and regulations give preference to religious minorities. While most citizens consider themselves Muslim and most of the inhabitants are not anti-Islamic, there is a pervasive fear of Islamic extremism among both the government and the general population.

In January 2004, a Baptist missionary was killed in his church in Isfara. A police investigation uncovered two suspects, one of whom fled the country. In February 2005, court officials sentenced a member of the radical Islamic group Bay’at to 24 years in prison for this murder. The other was arrested and in April 2005 was sentenced to fifteen years in prison.

During the period covered by this report, there were no events similar to the vandalism in 2003 that included fires in homes of two imams of the northern Sughd region and the scattering of Qur’an pages on the streets of a village. The investigations into these matters turned up no leads, and have since been closed.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The Embassy intervened on behalf of the Jehovah’s Witnesses with the SCRA and the government of Tursonzade, holding meetings and writing letters advocating for their registration.

Embassy officers regularly meet with Islamic leaders to discuss religious freedom and tolerance and to underscore the U.S. Government’s commitment to religious freedom.

The U.S. Embassy supported programs designed to create a better understanding of how democracies address the issue of secularism and religious freedom. A group of Islamic scholars and imams traveled to the United States in May 2005 as a part of the Embassy’s religious outreach strategy.

TURKEY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on Muslim and other religious groups and on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities.

There was some deterioration in respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. The Government’s Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyamet) initiated a public campaign against Christian missionary activity in the country. High-level government officials made statements depicting missionaries as a threat. There was also an increase in anti-Christian media coverage. Threats and vandalism against Christians and church facilities increased.

In addition, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is faced some restrictions and occasional harassment for alleged proselytizing or holding unauthorized meetings. The State continued to oppose "Islamic fundamentalism." Authorities continued their broad ban on wearing Muslim religious dress in government facilities, including universities, schools, and workplaces.

The generally tolerant relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom in principle; however, a sharp debate continued over the country's definition of "secularism," the proper role of religion in society, and the potential influence of the country's small minority of Islamists.

According to the general perception, Turkish identity is based on the Turkish language and the Islamic faith. Religious minorities say they are effectively blocked from careers in state institutions, a claim supported in a report by a government human rights body. Christians, Baha'is, and some Muslims faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and more radical Islamist elements continued to express anti-Semitic sentiments. Additionally, persons wishing to convert from Islam to another religion sometimes experienced social harassment and violence from relatives and neighbors.

The U.S. Government frequently discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives met frequently with government officials and representatives of religious groups during the reporting period to discuss issues related to religious freedom, including legal reform aimed at lifting restrictions on religious minorities, and the Government's anti-missionary campaign.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 301,383 square miles, and its population is approximately 70 million. According to the Government, an estimated 99 percent of the population is Muslim, the majority of whom are Sunni. According to the human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Mazlum-Der and representatives of various religious minority communities, the actual percentage of Muslims is slightly lower. The Government officially recognizes only three minority religious communities—Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians, and Jews—although other non-Muslim communities exist. The level of religious observance varies throughout the country, in part due to the influence of secular traditions and official restrictions on religious expression in political and social life.

In addition to the country's Sunni Muslim majority, there are an estimated 7-million Alevi, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shi'a and Sunni Islam and draws on the traditions of other religions found in Anatolia as well. Some Alevi practice rituals that include men and women worshipping together through oratory, poetry, and dance. The Government considers Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; however, some Alevi and radical Sunnis maintain Alevi are not Muslims.

In several areas of western Anatolia, there is also a small group of Muslims, sometimes referred to by outsiders as Tahtacilar, some of whose practices include rituals with ancient Turkmen (shamanist) roots; some Sunni groups consider these practices to be un-Islamic.

There are several other religious groups, mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities. While exact membership figures are not available, these religious groups include approximately 65,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians, 23,000 Jews, and fewer than 2,500 Greek Orthodox Christians. The Government interprets the 1923 Lausanne Treaty as granting special legal minority status exclusively to these three groups, although the treaty text refers broadly to "non-Muslim minorities" without listing specific groups. However, this recognition does not extend to the religious leadership organs; for example, the Ecumenical and Armenian Patriarchates continue to seek recognition of their legal status.

There also are approximately 10,000 Baha'is, an estimated 15,000 Syrian Orthodox (Syriac) Christians, 5,000 Yezidis, 3,300 Jehovah's Witnesses, 3,000 Protestants, and small, undetermined numbers of Bulgarian, Chaldean, Nestorian, Georgian, Roman Catholic, and Maronite Christians. The number of Syriac Christians in the southeast was once high; however, under pressure from government authorities and later under the impact of the war against the terrorist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), many Syriacs migrated to Istanbul, Western Europe, or North and South America. Over the last several years, small numbers of Syriacs have returned from overseas to the southeast, mostly from Western Europe. In most return cases, older family members have returned while younger ones have remained abroad.

Christian organizations estimate there are approximately 1,100 Christian missionaries 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; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on Muslim and other religious groups and on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, usually for the stated reason of preserving the “secular state.” The Constitution establishes the country as a “secular state” and provides for freedom of belief, freedom of worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas. However, other constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Core institutions of the State, including the Presidency, armed forces, judiciary, and state bureaucracy, have played the role of defending traditional Turkish secularism throughout the history of the Republic. In some cases, elements of the State have opposed policies of the elected government on the grounds that they threatened the secular state.

The Government oversees Muslim religious facilities and education through the Diyanet, which is under the authority of the Prime Ministry. The Diyanet has responsibility for regulating the operation of the country’s 75,000 registered mosques and employing local and provincial imams, who are civil servants. Some groups, particularly Alevis, claim that the Diyanet reflects mainstream Sunni Islamic beliefs to the exclusion of other beliefs; however, the Government asserts that the Diyanet treats equally all who request services.

A separate government agency, the General Directorate for Foundations (Vakiflar Genel Mudurlugu), regulates some activities of “non-Muslim” religious groups and their affiliated churches, monasteries, synagogues, and related religious property. There are 161 “minority foundations” recognized by the Vakiflar, including Greek Orthodox foundations with approximately 70 sites, Armenian Orthodox foundations with approximately 50 sites, and Jewish foundations with 20 sites, as well as Syrian Christian, Chaldean, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian, and Maronite foundations. The Vakiflar also regulates Muslim charitable religious foundations, including schools, hospitals, and orphanages.

In 1936, the Government required all foundations to declare their sources of income. In 1974, amid political tensions over Cyprus, the High Court of Appeals ruled that the minority foundations had no right to acquire properties beyond those listed in the 1936 declarations.

The Court’s ruling launched a process, continuing today, under which the State has seized control of properties acquired after 1936. The law also allows the State to expropriate properties in areas where the local “non-Muslim” population drops significantly. Minority religious groups, particularly the Greek and Armenian Orthodox communities, have lost numerous properties to the State in the past and continue to fight ongoing efforts by the State to expropriate properties.

The law allows the 161 religious minority foundations recognized by the Vakiflar to acquire property, and the Vakiflar has approved 340 applications by “non-Muslim” foundations to acquire legal ownership of properties. However, the legislation does not allow the communities to reclaim the hundreds of properties affiliated with foundations expropriated by the State over the years. Foundations have also been unable to acquire legal ownership of properties registered under names of third parties, including properties registered under the names of saints or archangels, during periods when foundations could not own property in their own name.

Government authorities do not interfere in matters of doctrine pertaining to “non-Muslim” religions, nor do they restrict the publication or use of religious literature among members of the religion.

There are legal restrictions against insulting any religion recognized by the Government, interfering with that religion’s services, or debasing its property.

Alevis freely practice their beliefs and build “Cem houses” (places of gathering), although Cem houses have no legal status as places of worship. Alevis in the Kartal district of Istanbul continued to fight a court battle against a decision by local authorities to deny them permission to build a Cem house. In January, Alevis in the Cankaya district of Ankara applied to acquire property to open a Cem house. Municipal authorities consulted the Diyanet, which issued a letter stating that Alevis in Cankaya did not need a Cem house because they could worship at a local mosque. Also in January, the Diyanet issued a letter to authorities in the Sultanbeyli district of Istanbul stating that Cem houses violate Islamic principles and Turkish law.

Many Alevis allege discrimination in the Government’s failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools. They also charge a bias in the Diyanet, which does not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership.

The Constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in primary and secondary schools. Religious minorities are exempted. However, some religious minorities—such as Protestants—face difficulty obtaining exemptions, particularly if their identification cards do not list a religion other than Islam. The Government claims the religion courses cover the range of world religions; however, religious minorities say the courses reflect Sunni Islamic doctrine, which, they maintain, explains why “non-Muslims” are exempt.

An Alevi parent in January 2004 filed suit in the European Court of Human Rights charging that the mandatory religion courses violate religious freedom; the case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. In a June 2004 report, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance recommended that the Government either make the courses optional or revise the content so that they genuinely and fairly cover all religions.

Officially recognized religious minorities may operate schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Such schools are required to appoint a Muslim as deputy principal; reportedly these deputies have more authority than their nominal supervisors. The curriculum of these schools includes Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish instruction. In May 2004, the Education Ministry stated that children with “non-Muslim” mothers could attend minority schools; previously, only those with “non-Muslim” fathers were permitted.

The Caferis, the country’s principal Shi’a community numbering between 500,000 and 1 million (concentrated mostly in eastern Turkey and Istanbul), do not face restrictions on their religious freedoms. They are free to build and operate their own mosques and to appoint their own imams; however, as with the Alevis, the Diyanet does not allocate funds for this purpose. The Caferis claim to have faced discrimination and repression in the past, but such incidents reportedly have been rare in recent years.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, state policy imposes some restrictions on religious groups and on religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities.

“Secularists” in the military, judiciary, and other branches of the bureaucracy continued to wage campaigns against what they label as proponents of “Islamic fundamentalism.” These groups view “religious fundamentalism,” which they do not define clearly, but which they assert is an attempt to impose the rule of Shari’a law in all civil and criminal matters, as a threat to the “secular State.” The National Security Council (NSC) categorizes religious fundamentalism as a threat to public safety.

According to Mazlum-Der and other groups, some government ministries have dismissed or barred from promotion civil servants suspected of anti-state or Islamist activities. Reports by Mazlum-Der, the media, and others indicated that the military sometimes dismisses religiously observant Muslims from military service. Such dismissals were based on behavior that military officials believed identified these individuals as Islamic fundamentalists, which they were concerned could indicate disloyalty to the secular State.

According to Mazlum-Der, the military charged individuals with lack of discipline for activities that included performing Muslim prayers or being married to women who wore headscarves. According to the military, officers and NCOs were sometimes dismissed for maintaining ties to Islamic fundamentalist organizations, despite repeated warnings from superior officers.

In February, a military court reportedly dismissed the deputy commander of the Jandarma Command in Ardahan for worshipping at a mosque while wearing his uniform.

Mystical Sufi and other religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats) have been banned officially since the mid-1920s; however, tarikats and cemaats remain active and widespread. Some prominent political and social leaders continue to associate with tarikats, cemaats, and other Islamic communities.

Under the law, religious services may take place only in designated places of worship. Municipal codes mandate that only the Government can designate a place of worship, and if a religion has no legal standing in the country, it may not be eligible for a designated site. “Non-Muslim” religious services, especially for religious groups that do not own property recognized by the Vakiflar, often take place on diplomatic property or in private apartments. Police occasionally bar Christians from holding services in private apartments, and prosecutors have opened cases against Christians for holding unauthorized gatherings.

Members of the St. Paul Union Church Association continued to try to purchase an abandoned church building in Antalya. The Foreign Ministry has been reviewing the purchase agreement since 2001.

In September 2004, Bodrum police closed a Protestant church and confiscated its signs under orders from the Governor. Authorities reopened the church several days later.

Protestants in Tarsus claimed they were subject to repeated threats and harassment, including from individual law enforcement officials and municipal officials, during the reporting period.

In May, the High Board of Radio and Television ordered a program of the Christian station Radyo Shema off the air for one episode as punishment for a broadcast it deemed "discriminatory." Christians affiliated with the station said the broadcast featured only passages read directly from the Bible. In June, the High Court of Appeals reportedly annulled the decision to sanction the station.

In September 2004, Parliament adopted a law prohibiting imams, priests, rabbis, or other religious leaders from "reproaching or vilifying" the Government or the laws of the State while performing their duties. Violations are punishable by prison terms of 1 month to 1 year, or 3 months to 2 years if the crime involves inciting others to disobey the law.

The authorities continue to monitor the activities of Eastern Orthodox churches but generally do not interfere with their activities. The Government does not recognize the ecumenical status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, acknowledging him only as the head of the country's dwindling Greek Orthodox community. High-level government leaders often assert publicly that use of the term "ecumenical" in reference to the Patriarch violates the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. However, government officials privately acknowledge that Lausanne does not address the issue.

As a result, the Government has long maintained that only citizens of the country can be members of the Church's Holy Synod and participate in Patriarchal elections. Members of the Greek Orthodox community said these restrictions threaten the survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, because, with fewer than 2,500 Greek Orthodox left in the country, the community is becoming too small to maintain the institution.

In March 2004, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I appointed six non-Turkish-citizen metropolitans to the Holy Synod, representing the first time in the 80-year history of the country that noncitizens had been appointed to the body. Government officials said they were conducting a legal analysis of the appointments.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul continues to seek to reopen the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli in the Sea of Marmara. The Government closed the seminary in 1971, when the State nationalized all private institutions of higher learning. Under existing restrictions, religious communities other than Sunni Muslims cannot legally train new clergy in the country for eventual leadership. Coreligionists from outside the country have been permitted to assume leadership positions in some cases, but in general all religious community leaders, including Patriarchs and Chief Rabbis, must be citizens.

In November 2004, the High Court of Appeals upheld the Vakiflar's February 2004 expropriation of an orphanage on the Prince's Islands that had belonged to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In April, the Patriarchate filed an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights.

The Armenian Orthodox community continued a legal battle against the Government's expropriation of properties belonging to the Yedikule Surp Pirgic Armenian Hospital Foundation in Istanbul. In March, the Treasury attempted to sell a building expropriated from the foundation to a private company, but the Finance Ministry blocked the sale. The European Court of Human Rights continued proceedings related to the appeal by the Armenian Orthodox community of the 1999 expropriation of two other foundation properties.

No law explicitly prohibits proselytizing or religious conversions; however, many prosecutors and police regard proselytizing and religious activism with suspicion. Police occasionally bar Christians from handing out religious literature. Proselytizing is often considered socially unacceptable; Christians performing missionary work are sometimes beaten and insulted. If the proselytizers are foreigners, they may be deported, but generally they are able to reenter the country. Police officers may report students who meet with Christian missionaries to their families or to university authorities.

The Government waged a public campaign against Christian missionary activity. The Diyanet drafted an anti-missionary sermon and distributed it to imams. The sermon, delivered in mosques across the country in March, depicted missionaries as part of a plot by foreign powers to "steal the beliefs of our young people and children." The sermon also implied that Christians are polytheists.

State Minister Mehmet Aydin, who oversees the Diyanet, issued a written statement in response to a question in January from a parliamentarian about missionaries. In the statement, Aydin calls missionary activity “separatist and destructive” and claims that, “history, as well as contemporary developments, have demonstrated that missionary activities are not an innocent act of communicating one’s religion or exercising religious freedom, but a highly planned movement with political motives.” Aydin also advised citizens to report missionary activity to authorities.

Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu issued a similarly argued statement, in which he reported that 344 persons had informed authorities that they had changed their religion between 1997 and 2004; 338 converted from Islam to Christianity and 6 from Islam to Judaism.

In June, three Selcuk University faculty members spoke at a conference in Adana on “Armenian Issues and Missionary Activities.” The speakers reportedly depicted both Armenians and missionaries as threats, with one faculty member warning the audience that missionaries seek to “divide Turkey.”

Also in June, the Diyanet published a book on missionaries in which the author states that “missionaries and the Crusades are related.” The author further claims that Muslims throughout history have never tried to convert “non-Muslims” and have only explained their beliefs “in an honest fashion,” whereas Christian missionaries have used “all means, including the use of sheer force.” The Diyanet distributed the book free of charge to parliamentarians and students.

By the end of the reporting period, there was no verdict in the trial proceedings in the case of three members of the Nationalist Movement Party who severely beat Yakup Cindilli, a convert to Christianity, for distributing New Testaments in Bursa Province in 2003.

Authorities continued to enforce a long-term ban on the wearing of headscarves at universities and by civil servants in public buildings. Women who wear headscarves and persons who actively show support for those who defy the ban have been disciplined or have lost their jobs in the public sector as nurses and teachers. Students who wear head coverings are officially not permitted to register for classes, although some faculty members permit students to wear head coverings in class.

Many secularists accuse Islamists of using advocacy for wearing the headscarf as a political tool and say they fear that efforts to repeal the headscarf ban will lead to pressure against women who choose not to wear a head covering.

Opponents of the headscarf ban staged a number of nonviolent protests against the policy during the reporting period. In May, an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 persons attended an Ankara demonstration against the headscarf ban.

In March, the High Court of Appeals upheld the conviction and 20-month prison sentence of Mehmet Sevket Eygi for writing against the headscarf ban. The court in its ruling argued that freedom of speech is subordinate to the protection of public order in democracies, and it maintained that Eygi’s criticism of the headscarf ban and its supporters constituted “hatred and animosity.”

In May, Constitutional Court President Mustafa Bumin and Speaker of Parliament Bulent Arinc engaged in a sharp, public dispute over the headscarf ban. Bumin asserted in a speech that the Constitutional Court would annul any parliamentary legislation aimed at lifting the ban; Arinc replied that Parliament has the authority to close the Court.

A 1997 law made 8 years of secular education compulsory. After completing the 8 years, students may pursue study at imam hatip (Islamic preacher) high schools, which cover both the standard high school curriculum and Islamic theology and practice. Imam hatip schools are classified as vocational, and graduates of vocational schools face an automatic reduction in their university entrance exam grades if they apply for university programs outside their field of high school specialization. This reduction effectively bars imam hatip graduates from enrolling in university programs other than theology. Many pious Turks criticize the religious instruction provided in the regular schools as inadequate. Most families who enroll their children in imam hatip schools do so to expose them to more extensive religious education, not to train them as imams.

Only the Diyanet is authorized to provide religion courses outside of school, although clandestine private courses do exist. Students who complete 5 years of primary school may enroll in Diyanet Qur’an classes on weekends and during summer vacation. Many Qur’an courses function unofficially. Only children 12 and older legally may register for official Qur’an courses, and Mazlum-Der reports that police often raid illegal courses for younger children. According to Mazlum-Der, in 2 separate incidents in March, law enforcement authorities raided a Qur’an course in Kabala, Mardin Province, detaining 30 persons, and a course in Tarakli, Sakarya Province, detaining 3 persons.

In June, Parliament adopted a law reducing the prison term for those convicted of operating illegal educational courses and allowing courts to issue fines instead of prison sentences. The law would apply to illegal Qur'an courses.

In September 2004, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses requested legal recognition as a religious association. They were informed that association status could be given, but it would remain illegal for anyone who was not part of the association to attend religious meetings. The Jehovah's Witnesses, unable to accept these terms, did not submit their request.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported continuing official harassment of their worship services because they are not members of an officially recognized religion. In June, authorities sealed a Kingdom Hall (place of worship) used by members of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Akcay, Balikesir Province.

Restoration or construction may be carried out in buildings and monuments considered "ancient" only with authorization of the regional board on the protection of cultural and national wealth. Bureaucratic procedures and considerations relating to historic preservation in the past have impeded repairs to religious facilities, especially in the case of Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox properties. Groups are prohibited from using funds from their properties in one part of the country to support their existing population in another part of the country.

Religious affiliation is listed on national identity cards. Some religious groups, such as the Baha'i, are unable to state their religion on their cards because their religion is not included among the options; they have made their concerns known to the Government. There were reports that authorities have become more flexible regarding the religious affiliation that may be listed. In September 2004, an Ankara court approved the application of a family requesting permission to leave the religion portion of their children's identity cards blank until they reach 18 years of age.

There were reports that local officials harassed some persons who converted from Islam to another religion when they sought to amend their cards. Some "non-Muslims" maintained that listing religious affiliation on the cards exposes them to discrimination and harassment.

In October 2004, the Government's Human Rights Consultation Board issued a report on minorities, which stated that "non-Muslims" are effectively barred from careers in state institutions such as the armed forces, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Police, and the National Intelligence Agency. Without refuting its findings, a number of government officials harshly criticized the report, and Ankara prosecutors opened an investigation against the report's principal authors. There were no developments in the investigation at the end of the reporting period. Members of minority religious communities confirmed the report's conclusions. They said "non-Muslim" citizens are viewed as foreigners, and are therefore considered unqualified to represent the state.

In March, the High Court of Appeals upheld an Istanbul court's June 2003 acquittal of 13 Ahmadi Muslims charged under the Anti-Terrorism Law.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reports of abuse targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

At the end of the reporting period, court proceedings continued in the Istanbul trial of 69 suspects charged in connection with the November 2003 terrorist bombings of two synagogues, the British Consulate, and a bank.

In an incident that arose out of the bombings, a court case was opened in September 2004 against the 17-year-old son of one of the alleged perpetrators and two journalists on anti-Semitism charges. The charges stemmed from an interview with the daily Milliyet in which the youth said, "the attacks did not touch the hearts of the members of my family because the target was Jews," and, "if Muslims hadn't been killed, we would have been happy. We don't like Jews." Two Milliyet journalists were charged with providing a platform for incitement against members of another religion. Trial proceedings in the cases continued at the end of the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In September 2004, the Governor and Jandarma officials in Sirnak Province evicted members of a civil defense force known as the village guards who were preventing a group of Syriac Christians from returning to their homes. The Syriacs, who fled due to the PKK conflict, returned and found 20 village guards occupying

their homes in the village of Sarikoy. The Sirnak Governor cut off electricity to the village, and Jandarma officers evacuated the village and disarmed the village guards. The Syrians reportedly paid local authorities \$93,700 for the relocation effort.

Also in September, Parliament adopted a law that prohibits forcing persons to declare or change their religious, political, or philosophical beliefs or preventing them from expressing or spreading such beliefs. The law specifically prohibits the use of force or threats to prevent persons from gathering for worship or religious ceremonies. Violations of the law are punishable with 1 to 3 years in prison.

In November 2004, a local board charged with protecting cultural and historic sites approved the application of the Diyarbakir Evangelical Church to have its property zoned as a place of worship, reversing its May 2004 ruling against the Church.

Local authorities for the first time allowed the Syriac community to hold a Syriac New Year celebration. Members of the Syriac community said more than 3,000 visitors from Europe, Iraq, and Syria attended the event, held April 1 in Midyat, Mardin Province.

In June, the Council of State, a high administrative appeals court, ruled that the Batikent Protestant Church in Ankara is entitled to receive water from the municipality at no cost. The court determined that the municipality had been violating the principle of equality by supplying free water to mosques but not churches. A lower court had rejected the church's request for free water.

In June, members of the Baha'i community received written notification that they would be permitted to renovate a sacred property in Edirne.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The officially tolerant relationship among religions in society contributes to religious freedom; however, some Muslims, Christians, Baha'is, and other religious communities face societal suspicion and mistrust. Jews and Christians from most denominations freely practice their religions and report little discrimination in daily life. However, citizens who convert from Islam to another religion often experience some form of social harassment or pressure from family and neighbors. Proselytizing on behalf of "non-Muslim" religions is socially unacceptable and sometimes dangerous. A variety of newspapers and television shows regularly publish and broadcast anti-Christian messages, and government officials have asserted that missionary activity is not covered under the concept of religious freedom.

Religious pluralism is widely viewed as a threat to Islam and to "national unity." Nationalist sentiments sometimes contain anti-Christian or anti-Semitic overtones.

In September 2004, an estimated 1,000 protestors gathered outside the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and burned an effigy of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. The protest was organized by the youth wing of the Nationalist Movement Party, whose leaders accused the Patriarch of interfering in internal politics by commenting on religious reform and the country's EU candidacy. In October 2004, unknown persons threw a homemade bomb over the wall of the Patriarchate; the bomb blew out several windows and damaged the roof of the cathedral. Police provided protection for the Christian religious leaders following these incidents.

In November 2004, three assailants broke into the office of an expatriate Protestant in Gaziantep, threatened him with a gun and knife, bound and gagged him, and told him he had to leave the country because of his religious activities.

Also in November 2004, approximately 40 members of an extreme nationalist organization raided a Christian music concert in Tarsus.

There was a significant increase in anti-Christian media coverage following the distribution of Bibles in December 2004 by missionaries in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir. ATV, for example, broadcast a report in January mixing coverage of a Protestant church with footage of a sex cult. In May, the Islamist daily *Yeni Safak* published an interview with a person who claimed missionaries were using hypnosis to convert Muslims. The negative publicity coincided with the Government's anti-missionary campaign, and was followed by an increase in threats against Christians and attacks on churches.

In December 2004, unknown individuals set fire to a wall outside the Izmit Protestant Church. In February, assailants threw a Molotov cocktail into the upper floor of the church.

In January, a group of 60 to 70 nationalists gathered outside Dirilis Protestant Church in Istanbul, chanted slogans, vandalized the premises, and beat the landlord when he confronted them. Police subsequently refused to provide protection for the church on the grounds that the property is not an officially registered place of wor-

ship. Police later detained three suspects believed to have participated in the protest.

In April, unknown assailants detonated percussion bombs outside the Protestant Fellowship office in Gaziantep and in front of the home of a Fellowship member. Fellowship members also received threatening letters.

In April, unknown assailants smashed the windows of the International Protestant Church of Ankara and threw two Molotov cocktails into the building, damaging the carpet and walls. The church was empty at the time. One month before the attack, the church received an email from a group threatening to kill Christians.

In April, Syrians who had recently returned from abroad to the village of Sari discovered an explosive device in an orchard where they were planning to re-start cultivation. In June, a landmine exploded in the village of Harabele as a car carrying a Syriac bishop and two others passed by. No one was injured in the explosion. The vehicle passengers were working to assist the return of Syrians from abroad. No suspects were identified in either case. Members of the Syriac community said the bomb incidents discouraged Syrians abroad from returning to the country.

Members of the Syriac community said local villagers, particularly village guards, often occupied the homes of Syrians who fled the country, refusing to leave when Syrians attempted to return. The village guards are a civil defense force of approximately 58,000, mostly in the southeast. They are reputed to be the least disciplined of the security forces and are often accused of drug trafficking, rape, corruption, theft, and other human rights abuses.

According to the Syriac community, more than 50 unoccupied Syriac homes have been destroyed in the village of Bardakci, Mardin Province, since 2000. The majority of the village's Syriac residents fled the region in the mid-1980s. One of the village's two Syriac churches has been converted into a mosque, without consulting with the Syriac community.

In May, unknown individuals painted a red swastika on the apartment door of a Protestant pastor in Izmit and left a threatening letter.

Also in May, a Christian couple in Kayseri received two e-mails from an unknown party threatening to kill them because of their religious faith.

During the reporting period, Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" climbed to the top 10 on the bestseller lists of some of the country's major bookstore chains. In February, the Islamist daily *Vakit* published crude cartoons depicting German Interior Minister Otto Schily covered with Swastikas and Stars of David. The cartoons were published in protest of the German Government's decision to close the paper's European edition for its articles denying the Holocaust.

Trial proceedings continued in the appeal of Kerim Akbas, who was convicted in 2004 for TV broadcasts inciting violence against Christians.

Members of the secular establishment fear the influence of Islamism and reject the involvement of even moderate Islam in politics.

During the observance of Ramadan in October–November 2004, there were reportedly several incidents of university students attacking students who were not fasting in accordance with Islamic tradition. In October, the rector of Gaziosmanpasa University in Tokat opened an investigation against 10 students and a faculty member in connection with such attacks. In November 2004, police intervened after fasting students at Ankara University attacked nonfasting students, according to press reports.

Iftar dinners, evening events tied to the daily breaking of the Ramadan fast, often involve invitations to religious and secular leaders of various faiths. Iftars hosted by diplomats, as well as business and religious leaders, may include invitations to people of other faiths as a sign of openness and hospitality.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and other Mission officials, including staff of the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul and the U.S. Consulate in Adana, enjoy close relations with the Muslim majority and other religious groups. The U.S. Embassy continues to urge the Government to enable the reopening of the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island. In December 2004, the Archons of the Order of St. Andrew, an American group that actively supports the Ecumenical Patriarchate, visited Istanbul and Ankara with the support of the Mission. The Ambassador accompanied the Archons to a meeting with Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul to encourage an agreement on the reopening of Halki and a resolution of the issue of properties seized by the Government from religious minority communities.

In June, President Bush met with Prime Minister Erdogan and discussed the importance of maintaining the tradition of religious freedom, including urging the re-opening of Halki.

The Ambassador discussed religious freedom regularly in private meetings with Cabinet members. These discussions touched on both government policy regarding Islam and other religions, and specific cases of alleged religious discrimination. Other Embassy officers held similar meetings with government officials. Diplomats from the Embassy and Consulates hosted Iftars and met regularly with representatives of the various religious groups. These meetings covered a range of topics, including the Government's anti-missionary campaign, problems faced by "non-Muslim" groups, and the debate over the role of Islam in the country.

The Mission uses the International Visitor Program to introduce professionals in various fields to the United States and American counterparts. Religious issues are included among these programs.

TURKMENISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion; however, in practice the Government continues to monitor all forms of religious expression. All groups must register in order to gain legal status with the Government. Until 2004 the only religions that were registered successfully were the government-controlled branch of Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity; by the end of the period covered by this report, nine minority religious groups had registered, the Roman Catholic Church's application was pending, and at least three groups had decided not to register. The March 2004 amendments to the law on religious organizations and subsequent presidential decrees enabled the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to facilitate registration of some religious congregations and engendered a noticeable reduction in harassment of minority congregations. The Government limits the activities of unregistered religious congregations by prohibiting them from gathering publicly, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials. Often the Government's interpretation of the law is stricter in rural areas than in the capital, Ashgabat.

The status of Government respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. In March 2004, the President signed a decree pledging to register all religious groups, regardless of creed or number, and to adhere to generally accepted international norms and rules concerning treatment of religious minorities; however, the registration process is onerous and additional requirements for minority congregations to register and operate exist and remain burdensome in practice. The President signed a decree in May 2004 disavowing harsh requirements in an unpublished regulation and eliminating criminal penalties for members of unregistered religious groups. In early June 2004, the President granted amnesty to six Jehovah's Witnesses serving prison sentences for conscientious objection to military service and four more were amnestied on April 16, 2005, on the eve of a meeting between President Saparmurat Niyazov and the U.S. Ambassador.

Although the level of harassment continued to decrease in the last year, most religious groups continued to experience the types of government harassment similar to years past, including detention, arrest, confiscation of religious literature and materials, pressure to abandon religious beliefs, and threats of eviction and job loss. Unlike previous years, there were no confirmed reports of torture for religious belief or observance, but there was at least one account of a beating experienced by a woman detained for questioning in connection with practicing her faith. Human rights observers widely reported that the Government replaced a number of Sunni Muslim imams, including twice replacing the Mufti with individuals believed to be less independent in their interpretations of Islam, to better facilitate government control of mosques.

There is no general societal discrimination or violence based on religion. The overwhelming majority of citizens identify themselves as Sunni Muslim, and ethnic Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert to other faiths are viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized, but the society historically has been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs. The Government's restrictions on nontraditional religions do not stem from doctrinal differences or societal friction between the majority Muslim population and non-Muslim communities. Rather, many experts agree that official restrictions on religious freedom, a holdover from the Soviet era, reflect the Government's concern that liberal religious policies could lead to political dissent, particularly the emergence of extreme, political interpretations. The Government appears to view active participation in, or

sponsorship of, both traditional and nontraditional religions, as a threat to its own stability.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy representatives and Department of State officials raised specific cases of religious freedom abuses in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. The U.S. Ambassador, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the Department of State's Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, and the Counsel to the U.S. Helsinki Commission urged senior Government officials to cease minority religious group harassment, stop the demolition of mosques, and register minority groups. In addition, the U.S. Ambassador repeatedly conveyed messages urging the Government to make specific improvements with respect to religious freedom. Improving registration for nongovernmental groups, including religious organizations, and permitting them to meet regularly was a top U.S. priority. Embassy officers met with representatives of unregistered and registered minority religious groups on a continual basis and such groups have expressed an increased willingness to meet with the Government.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 188,457 square miles, and its population is approximately 5 million. Statistics regarding religious affiliation are not available. According to figures from the Government's most recent census (1995), ethnic Turkmen constituted 77 percent of the population. Minority populations included ethnic Uzbeks (9.2 percent), ethnic Russians (6.7 percent), and ethnic Kazakhs (2 percent). Armenians, Azeris, and other ethnic groups comprised the remaining 5.1 percent. The majority is Sunni Muslim, and the largest minority is Russian Orthodox Christian; however, the level of active religious observance is unknown.

There has been a tightly controlled revival of Islam since independence. During the Soviet era, there were only 4 mosques operating; now there are approximately 350. Ethnic Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs are predominantly Sunni Muslim. There are small pockets of Shi'a Muslims, many of whom are ethnic Iranians, Azeris, or Kurds living along the border with Iran.

While the 1995 census showed that Russians comprised almost 7 percent of the population, subsequent emigration to Russia and elsewhere has reduced considerably this proportion. The majority of ethnic Russians and Armenians are Christian. Practicing Russian Christians are generally members of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). There are 11 Russian Orthodox churches in the main cities, 3 of which are in Ashgabat. A priest resident in Ashgabat leads the ROC. He serves under the religious jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Archbishop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The president has appointed a different Orthodox priest to represent the Orthodox Church on the Government's Council for Religious Affairs. There are five Russian Orthodox priests, but no seminaries.

Russians and Armenians also comprise a significant percentage of members of unregistered religious congregations, although ethnic Turkmen appear to be increasingly represented among these groups as well. There are small communities of the following unregistered denominations: the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Roman Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and several unaffiliated, nondenominational evangelical Christian groups. Small communities of Baha'is, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Hare Krishnas are registered with the Government. Two groups of Pentecostal Christians, the Greater Grace Church, Baptists, the Church of Christ, and the New Apostolic Church were able to register in May. For some, the process of registration took upwards of seven months. A very small community of ethnic Germans, most of whom live in and around the city of Serakhs, are reportedly practicing Lutherans. Approximately 1,000 ethnic Poles live in Turkmenistan, though they have been largely absorbed into the Russian community and consider themselves Russian Orthodox. The Roman Catholic community in Ashgabat, which includes both citizens and foreigners, meets in the chapel of the Vatican Nunciature. Foreign missionaries, typically representing evangelical Protestant denominations, operate, although the extent of their activities is unknown.

Estimates show approximately 1,000 ethnic Jews living in the country. Most are members of families who came from Ukraine during World War II. There also are some Jewish families living in Turkmenabat, on the border with Uzbekistan, who are known as Bokharan Jews, referring to the city of Bokhara, Uzbekistan. There are no synagogues or rabbis and the Jewish community continues to dwindle as members emigrate to Israel, Russia, and Germany. The community gathers for reli-

gious observances but has not opted to register as a religious group, nor have there been reports of harassment.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government placed some restrictions on these rights. Moreover, the Turkmen Criminal Code protects individuals against violations of religious freedom or persecution by private actors; in practice it is not enforced. In November 2003, the Government implemented a law on religion to replace the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and its subsequent amendments in 1995 and 1996. Following the 1995 amendment, religious groups had to have 500 citizens at least 18 years of age in each locality in which they wished to register. This requirement made it impossible for religious communities other than Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians to register, a situation which was remedied in March 2004, when the Government published amendments to the religion law that reduced numerical thresholds for registration from 500 to 5, and made all minority groups eligible to register. The amendments also establish two categories of religious assemblies: religious groups (to comprise at least 5 and not more than 50 members of legal age) and religious organizations (to comprise at least 50 members). The amendments leave significant gray areas of the law that permitted the Government to delay registration, sometimes up to nine months. In June, the President made a statement saying that all those trying to register would get a response from the MOJ in an expeditious manner. The new regulation remained untested at the end of the reporting period.

The November 2003 law, which replaced the 1991 law, required all religious organizations to register, made operation of unregistered religious organizations a criminal offense, further restricted religious education, and monitored financial and material assistance to religious groups from foreign sources. Parallel amendments to the criminal code imposed penalties of up to one-year imprisonment for a number of violations for which minority groups traditionally have faced administrative fines. In response to international pressure, criminal penalties were lifted in May 2004, but the remaining law continues to allow the Government to control religious life and to restrict the activities of all religious groups.

The President signed a decree in January 2004, that strengthened the November 2003 law on religious practice and religious organizations. A prohibitive requirement introduced in the new registration rules increased registration fees for religious organizations to \$100 (2.5 million manat at the unofficial rate). In addition, the MOJ was no longer obliged to publish in the local media a list of registered religious organizations. This not only limited the transparency of legally registered groups, isolating them from other religious communities, but also limited the ability of the public to respond when authorities harassed legally registered groups. The law also allowed the MOJ the right to cancel a group's registration based on vaguely defined charges.

In March 2004, the Government adopted but did not publish an implementing regulation and recommended standard charter, which stipulated harsh requirements for religious groups wishing to register. The decree imposed financial and travel restrictions on registered religious organizations. After international pressure, these regulations were publicly disavowed in a decree in May 2004.

Until June 2004, governmental entities at all levels, including the courts, had interpreted the laws in such a way as to discriminate against those practicing any faith other than Sunni Islam or Russian Orthodox Christianity, whose congregations represented the only two religions to successfully register. Now, members of nine other registered groups are legally allowed to practice their faith. In practice, government policies, including those at the city level such as zoning regulations on the use of private residences, have created difficulties for some of the groups to find places to hold worship services.

Since the repeal of the unpublished regulation in May 2004, nine new religious groups have registered: Evangelical Christian Baptist Church of Turkmenistan; Seventh-day Adventist Church of Turkmenistan; Bahai Community of Turkmenistan; Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas); Full Gospel Christian Church of Turkmenistan (Pentecostals); Light of the East Church (Dashoguz Pentecostal Church); Greater Grace Church of Turkmenistan; Church of Christ; and New Apostolic Church of Turkmenistan. Shi'a Muslims were not registered by the end of the reporting period, and there were no reports that they tried to register since the May 2004 repeal, although they remain in contact with the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) which the Government maintains to report to President Niyazov and osten-

sibly act as an intermediary between the Government bureaucracy and registered religious organizations.

Some groups remain either fearful of registering, citing the amount and type of information the Government requires, or refuse on principle to do so. Unregistered religious groups are forbidden to conduct religious activities, including gathering, disseminating religious materials, and proselytizing. Government authorities have disrupted meetings of unregistered religious groups at a less frequent rate than in previous years. According to the amended law, participants of those groups are subject to fines and administrative (not criminal) arrest under the administrative code. Disruptions decreased significantly during the period covered by this report although intermittent incidents continued.

The Government has incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition as part of its effort to redefine a national identity. For example, the Government builds large, monumental mosques, such as the ones in Ashgabat, Gok Depe, and Gypjak, and local communities support village mosques. Despite its embrace of certain aspects of Islamic culture, the Government is concerned about foreign Islamic influence.

The Chairman of the CRA, the Imam of the Gok Depe Mosque, serves with three deputy chairmen: the Mufti of Turkmenistan, a representative of the ROC, and a government representative. In practice, the CRA acts as an arm of the state, exercising direct control over the hiring, promotion, and firing of both Sunni Muslim and Russian Orthodox clergy, as well as helping to control all religious publications and activities. Its writ is enforced through security forces, and it has no role in promoting interfaith dialogue. Although the Government does not officially favor any religion, it has provided financial and other support to the CRA for the construction of new mosques. The Government pays most Muslim clerics' salaries and approves all senior clerics' appointments, requiring them to report regularly to the CRA.

Throughout the reporting period, the CRA continued to urge imams to accord greater attention to President Niyazov's spiritual-social books on culture and heritage, *Rukhnama* and *Rukhnama II*, by teaching them as religious texts and placing them next to the Qur'an in some mosques. Phrases from the *Rukhnama* were inscribed on the large mosque in President Niyazov's home village of Gypjak. In 2003, the former Mufti of Turkmenistan, Nasrullah Ibn Ibadullah, was replaced, secretly tried, and sentenced in March 2004 to 22 years in prison. Ibn Ibadullah's replacement, Kakageldi Wepayev, was subsequently placed under house arrest for "misbehavior"—allegedly including drinking and womanizing—and replaced in August 2004 by then 27-year-old recent seminary graduate Rowshen Allaberdiyev.

The Government recognizes only Sunni Muslim holidays as national holidays. These include Gurban Bairam (Eid al-Adha), a three-day holiday commemorating the end of the Hajj, and Oraza-Bairam (Eid al-Fitr), commemorating the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

The Government does not offer alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors; individuals who want to refuse military service for religious reasons are offered noncombatant roles within the military. During the period covered by this report, four Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned for refusing to serve in the military; they were subsequently released.

There is no official religious instruction in public schools; however, the Government requires all public schools and institutes of higher learning to hold regular instruction on the *Rukhnama*. Beginning in 2002, the Ministry of Education required that each child bring a personal copy of the *Rukhnama* to school. In September 2004, Volume II of the *Rukhnama* was published and was integrated into the public school curriculum.

Article Six of the November 2004 law allows mosques to provide religious education to children after school for four hours a week with the approval of parents. People who graduate from institutions of higher religious education, (the law does not state if they must be Turkmen or international institutions) and who obtain CRA approval, may provide religious education. Citizens have the right to receive religious education individually or with other persons; however, providing religious education in private is prohibited, and those who do so are subject to punitive actions according to the law. Although some independent religious education exists, the Government has done nothing to promote religious education beyond the official version incorporating the *Rukhnama*. In anticipation of approval for religious education, some Sunni Mosques have begun regularly scheduled classes on the Qur'an.

The 2003 law prohibits the ROC from conducting religious education programs without CRA and presidential approval, and there were no reports that either the CRA or the President approved such programs. Home-schooling usually is allowed only in cases of severe illness or disability, and not for religious reasons.

The Government, through the CRA, does little to promote interfaith understanding or dialogue beyond that between Muslims and Russian Orthodox Chris-

tians. In the past, the Government sometimes actively disparaged minority religious groups. A 2003 issue of the state-owned newspaper "Adalat," published by the Ministry of Justice, published a vitriolic attack against Hare Krishnas and Jehovah's Witnesses, describing the groups as foreign and implying they were dangerous, but there were no such incidents reported during the reporting period.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Almost all religious minority groups in Turkmenistan reported fewer instances of harassment than in the previous reporting period. The Government officially has banned only extremist groups advocating violence. The activities of unregistered religious groups remain illegal with violators subject to fines and administrative arrest under the administrative code.

The Government restricts unregistered religious groups from establishing places of worship, and violations constitute an administrative offense. Registered groups also experienced difficulties establishing places of worship, although at the end of the reporting period some stated the largest remaining obstacle was the lack of funds to rent a public hall. Only five registered groups, three of which are minority religious groups, have established places of worship. The Government also forbids unregistered religious groups from gathering publicly or privately and can punish individuals or groups who violate these prohibitions. Some congregations continue to practice quietly, largely in private homes.

During the period covered by this report, the Government replaced a number of experienced imams with younger imams who had attended government-approved training, thus facilitating government control. Prior to December 2003, the Abu Bekir Mosque in Ashgabat was closed and ethnic Uzbek imams from three mosques were ousted for resisting the Council's pressure. In October 2004, six mosques were destroyed, some for no stated reason, others ostensibly for Ashgabat city "beautification" plans. At least seven mosques were destroyed during the reporting period. In 2004, a Sunni cemetery north of Ashgabat was leveled. Another cemetery in Ashgabat was being encroached upon by a high-rise development. Muslims in Bagyr reported they can no longer bury their family members in traditional cemeteries, but instead need to do so at a centralized location.

The Government restricts the number of mosques by requiring government permission for construction. Government policy is that every community should have one mosque; however, in March 2004, President Niyazov ordered that no more mosques were to be built and stated mosques would henceforth be led by state-appointed imams.

There are at least three Shi'a Muslim places of worship, two near Ashgabat and one in Turkmenbashi. Other Shi'a mosques still stand, but the Government does not permit imams to work in them. It continues to restrict their construction.

In 2005, the Government continued to limit participation in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj), specifying that only 188 pilgrims of the country's quota of 4,600 would be allowed to journey to Mecca. Transportation was provided free of charge by the national airline. The Government's control of pilgrims was strengthened in 2003 by the re-imposition of an exit visa requirement that was subsequently dropped following sustained international pressure.

The Government also controls access to Islamic education. The Theological Faculty at Turkmen State University in Ashgabat was the only academic institution to conduct Islamic education, and the Government restricts private Islamic teaching. In late June, the President closed the theology faculty and made theology a part of the history curriculum. In April, the Government replaced the head of the Turkmen Turkish International University with a Turkmen national, stating the university was conducting unauthorized religious education. In 2002, the President imposed an annual limit of 10 to 20 clerical students. They are to attend five years of study in the country but with the final two years served as internships in local mosques. In April 2004, an Islamic secondary school operating under the auspices of the sole remaining theological faculty was closed, reportedly in part because school administrators and teachers refused to promote the Rukhnama as an orthodox Islamic text.

The Government monitors even peaceful minority religious groups, particularly those perceived to have connections with or support from a supranational hierarchy. The law prohibits foreign-missionary activity, although in practice both Christian and Muslim missionaries are present. Ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups who are accused of disseminating religious material reportedly receive harsher treatment than others, particularly if they have received financial support from foreign sources. In January 2004, President Niyazov warned the newly appointed Mufti (who was subsequently replaced) against accepting money from foreigners seeking to influence mosques to propagate a more fundamentalist message.

The November 2003 Law on Religious Organizations stipulated that religious groups must report any financial or material assistance received from foreign sources. An amendment in March 2004 further required that they also register all assistance received from entities inside the country.

By decree, publishing religious literature is prohibited, limiting the availability of Qur'ans. There were periods in which it was difficult or impossible to find Qur'ans available for purchase.

The Government enforces the use of President Niyazov's spiritual book, the Rukhnama, in educational institutions, government buildings and mosques. Copies of the book are kept in some mosques, and authorities have pressured religious leaders to place it alongside the Qur'an and to preach Rukhnama in their services. In November 2003, the Ministry of National Security (MNB) closed down a mosque failing to place the Rukhnama on the same stand with the Qur'an for Friday prayer. In addition, according to unconfirmed reports, authorities have forced imams to begin sermons with praise for President Niyazov.

In 2002, the Government prohibited the import of all Russian-language newspapers and periodicals, including religious materials and the ROC's main journal, the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarch."

In practice the CRA must approve imported literature. Since the only members of the CRA are government officials, Sunni Muslims, and the ROC, this requirement restricted imported literature for minority religious groups.

The MNB and regional government officials harassed some members of minority religions for not sending their children to school on Saturdays, their day of worship. The Government reportedly threatened to revoke their registration if their children did not attend. Public school is held Monday through Saturday and by law children must go, although some estimate that only half of school children regularly attend school on Saturday.

In addition to occasionally restricting travel out of the country, there are reports that government officials denied entry visas based on religious affiliation. According to Forum 18, a British-based religious news organization covering Eurasia, in October 2004, a group of Seventh-day Adventists was denied entry visas, despite the fact that its invitation came from a registered church.

Jehovah's Witnesses, an unregistered group, were harassed repeatedly during 2004 and 2005. For example, on November 12, 2004, officials harassed a member in Ashgabat; and throughout the year, authorities confiscated Bibles at the border and from private homes. In their 2004 Report on International Religious Freedom, members of Jehovah's Witnesses report that some members of the group were dismissed from employment after their religious affiliation was discovered. The report also stated that some children were publicly humiliated in school because of their religious affiliation, and that according to one school director, teachers were fearful of losing their jobs if they did not comply with government orders to harass children from the group. These reports are similar to events reported in 2002 and in Adaban in 2003.

Before the lifting of the exit visa requirement, 48 Jehovah's Witnesses were denied visas to attend a religious convention in Tajikistan in 2003. In January 2004, the Government formally lifted the exit visa requirement, theoretically permitting travel by all those who wanted to participate in the Hajj or other travel for religious purposes; however, the Government maintains a "black list" of individuals, including believers, and continues to limit freedom of movement, although to a far lesser degree than previously. In January, an ethnic Russian pastor was stopped at a border crossing and was not allowed to enter Uzbekistan. After a day of waiting for approval to cross, he returned home. In March 2004, two Jehovah's Witnesses were prevented from boarding a flight to Kiev to attend a Jehovah's Witnesses conference because their names were on a "black list." They were told to apply to the Border Service Headquarters in Ashgabat for further explanation. In April 2004, Deutsche Welle Radio reported that five Jehovah's Witnesses were removed from a flight from Ashgabat to Moscow because they were blacklisted and forbidden to leave the country.

Members of unregistered religious groups continue to be denied entry visas. The head of the Bible Society from Uzbekistan reportedly was barred from visiting in September 2004. In recent years, Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas have also been denied entry.

There was no progress in the restitution of the Armenian Apostolic church in Turkmenbashi.

Although there have been no reports of harassment of Pentecostals since 2002, according to Forum 18, in April, several Pentecostals were summoned for questioning in Turkmenbashi. Ashgabat's Pentecostal church was seized in 2001 and has yet to be returned, leaving the group vulnerable to continuing harassment.

Several religious minority groups suspect that the Government monitors them by infiltrating their gatherings; nonetheless, communities continue to engage in regular activities. The level of harassment has continued to decrease over the past year; however, officers from the Sixth Police Department in Ashgabat, the division charged with fighting organized crime and terrorism, still occasionally question members of religious minorities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The serious mistreatment of some religious minority members, which began in 2003, continued and was extended to the Muslim community. In March 2004, Turkmenistan's popular and respected former Mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, was secretly tried and sentenced to 22 years in prison, reportedly for his alleged role in a failed 2002 coup plot. Ibadullah had been dismissed as Mufti in 2003, reportedly in part for his refusal to teach the President's book, Rukhnama, as a sacred text. Little is known about the whereabouts or the condition of Ibadullah, despite calls from the international community for access to him and for his release.

Muslim religious leader Hoja Ahmed Orazglychev remained isolated in internal exile in Tejen for alleged criminal activity. Some believe his refusal to publicly support the Niyazov regime and Orazglychev's strict religious beliefs contributed to his exile.

The Government threatened members of religious minority groups with fines, loss of employment and housing, and imprisonment because of their beliefs. There were also reports of a beating and raids.

During the period covered by this report, despite the President's initial announcement in June 2004 that all imprisoned conscientious objectors should be released, four Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced to prison because of their objection to military service. They were invited for an interview by the authorities but were immediately taken into custody and put in pretrial detention. After the trials, they were transferred to the Seydi penal colony. President Niyazov granted a general amnesty for conscientious objectors on April 16, which included the release of the four Jehovah's Witnesses. In June 2004, six others had been granted amnesty by a Presidential decree and released. Another was released in January 2004. In April 2004, the Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative reported that three unnamed Baptists had gone into hiding to avoid arrest for refusing conscription on religious grounds.

On March 2, Jehovah's Witness Nazikgul Orazova was called to the Internal Affairs Ministry for questioning, where she was reportedly beaten during detention. Orazova was found guilty of proselytizing and was fined \$50 (1,250,000 manat). When she stated that she could not pay, the court ordered police to confiscate the same value in possessions. A Forum 18 report indicated that one Jehovah's Witness was fined a large sum in April 2004. In September 2004, Jehovah's Witnesses Gulkamar Dzhumayeva and Gulsherin Babkulyeva were arrested while holding a private discussion with citizens. Police officials hit Babkulyeva on the head, sexually harassed her, and threatened to rape her. The women were held overnight without contact with their families and eventually released. In November 2004, based on her affiliation with the Witnesses, Bilbil Kulyyeva was forcibly evicted from a hostel by an Ashgabat official of the CRA. In 2003, police arrested a member of Jehovah's Witnesses in Turkmenabat and beat him during his 20-hour detention.

Two raids on meetings of members of Jehovah's Witnesses occurred in March 2004, one, according to a report from Forum 18 News Service, in a private home in Ashgabat the day after the March 2004 Presidential Decree pledging adherence to international standards for respect of religious freedom. A similar raid occurred in March 2004, and a woman was taken to a police station, forced to write a statement dictated by the police, and was sexually harassed by a district police officer.

In March 2004, authorities entered the home of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and demanded he immediately pay a fine from 2001 that allegedly remained unpaid. Although the individual had paid all fines as required, the officials said they had an order from the city administration to collect and that if he did not pay, they would confiscate his property.

Oguldzhan Dzhumanazarova was released in 2003, after having served half of her prison sentence for a conviction the Jehovah's Witness community said was based on fabricated evidence. She is suffering from health problems due to harsh prison conditions. Though released, she remains under surveillance by the security agencies.

In March 2004, the CRA pressured a member of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ashgabat to renounce his faith and he was fired from his job when he refused. From May to September 2003, up to 40 members of the group, male and female, were taken to the Sixth Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The males were beaten,

all were required to renounce their faith in writing, and their passports were confiscated until fines were paid.

There were no reports of authorities beating Hare Krishnas; however, in April, for violating a city ordinance, Ashgabat city officials threatened the Krishna Consciousness Society with the confiscation of their place of worship, a privately owned residence that was used as a temple. In 2003, according to Forum 18, authorities raided a meeting of the Krishna Consciousness Society in Ashgabat and beat one member during an interrogation. Authorities reportedly filmed the occupants of the home, confiscated all religious articles and literature, and fined the group. In June, a member of the Society returned after more than 3 years abroad. She was detained and threatened with arrest for illegally departing the country. A local lawyer said that due to the Statute of Limitations she could not be arrested for that crime. She remains in a psychiatric institution for observation.

Local officials occasionally continued to harass religious minorities, often because they were not aware of the March 2004 Presidential Decree. In April 2004, according to the Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative (an opposition group operating out of Vienna), secret police officers, representatives of the city administration for religious affairs, and police officers raided a meeting of the Krishna Consciousness Society in a private home in Mary. After the group was questioned for 3 hours, a secret policeman threatened the members with fines, dismissal from work, and criminal charges before allowing them to return home. In 2003, Geldy Khudaikuliev, a Baptist congregation leader in Gok Depe, was detained without charge for 6 days. Khudaikuliev was released later the same month, as a result of international pressure. Baptists continued to be fined during the period covered by this report. In April, according to Forum 18, 5 members of a Baptist Church in Turkmenabat were fined approximately \$60 (1,500,000 manat) for holding a small service.

According to a Forum 18, in 2003, a deaf and mute Baptist woman was summoned to court where she was threatened with fines and a fifteen-day imprisonment. In addition, authorities attempted to force her to deliver a summons to other Christians, which she refused to do. A few days later, court authorities confiscated her passport and withdrew her pension in order to collect a \$10 fine (250,000 manat). The officials admitted to stealing \$1.60 (4,000 manat) from the woman and not returning it. Forum 18 also reported that another deaf and mute Baptist woman was summoned to court in 2003. She was also threatened with 15 days imprisonment if she failed to pay a fine.

Individuals were also fined in 2003, when authorities raided a Baptist prayer meeting in Turkmenabat. That same year, police raided the meeting of an unregistered Christian group, confiscated its Bibles, and fined its leaders \$12 (about 300,000 manat). Two court decisions supported the actions.

According to Forum 18, in May 2004, a Hindu was forced by police officers to sign a statement renouncing his beliefs after being threatened with physical violence and criminal punishment.

Reports of authorities arbitrarily arresting and interrogating members of minority religious groups who met to worship significantly declined after the March Presidential Decree; however, there were intermittent accounts of authorities continuing to arbitrarily arrest and interrogate members of some minority religious groups while they worshipped, including the Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Shi'a Muslims. During such incidents, authorities took a range of actions including: filming those present; taking the names, addresses, and places of work of the congregants; threatening fines and imprisonment; confiscating religious literature; and detaining members.

In May, a small group of Baha'is were detained and questioned for a brief period by local security officials. In 2003, officials detained Bahai's in Mary and Turkmenbashi.

During the reporting period, the Government notified religious groups attempting to meet for worship that they were subject to a number of financial penalties, although there have been no reports of enforcement since April 2004. In some cases officials notified the groups that the fines had been dropped. In April, a branch of a registered group had a fine imposed for an illegal meeting, prior to the enacting of regulations for affiliate registration, and the group began the process of contesting the fine in court.

Authorities threatened individual members of some religious minority groups with eviction without reassignment or resettlement unless they immediately ceased holding or attending meetings. Eviction and resettlement are repressive tools sometimes used by the Government. For example, the home of former Mufti Ibadulla ibn Nasrullah was confiscated and assigned to a family whose house had been demolished because of government construction projects.

In 2003, a local MNB officer threatened to evict and resettle the owner of an apartment who was holding a meeting of an unregistered religious minority group. The congregants were detained, questioned and fined. Also in 2003, officers of the MNB and local police raided a meeting of five members of the same group in Abadan. In September 2004, a home was raided in Seydi.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Since the March 2004 Presidential decree amending registration requirements, nine religious minorities have registered: the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church of Turkmenistan; the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Turkmenistan; the Bahai Community of Turkmenistan; the Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas); the Full Gospel Christian Church of Turkmenistan (Pentecostals); the Light of the East Church (Dashoguz Pentecostal Church); the Greater Grace Church of Turkmenistan; the Church of Christ; and the New Apostolic Church of Turkmenistan.

Unlike previous reporting periods, Russian Orthodox Christians did not report any abuses and were not prevented from practicing their faith.

In May, the Government stated it had introduced procedures for regional affiliates of religious groups to register. By the end of the reporting period, no minority religions had attempted to register such an affiliate.

Minority religious groups reported that harassment continued to lessen, and that conditions were much better than in 2004. Numerous representatives of minority religions stated the Ministry of Justice and security services have started to display a more helpful and positive attitude. Some minority religious leaders commented that the attitude of the CRA was somewhat more helpful. Several religious groups continue to search for places of worship; some stated financial difficulties rather than government interference was the major obstacle for their organization. In September 2004, police returned Bibles that had been confiscated from a Baptist group and apologized for their actions.

In response to international pressure, President Niyazov granted a pardon for conscientious objectors in June 2004 and again in April 2005. Unlike in previous years, incarcerated Jehovah Witnesses were not singled out for abuse in prison and were permitted to pray and to have access to Bibles.

Despite recent registration, the Seventh-day Adventists have yet to receive compensation for their church that was razed by the Government in 1999. In March, they began renting a space for regular worship services, providing them with a legal place to meet.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There were no reports of general societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the period covered by this report.

Restrictive government control, indigenous Islamic culture, and 70 years of Soviet rule have meant that traditional mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in society. Local interpretations of Islam place a heavy premium on rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death ("sadakas"), featuring music and dancing that more traditional Muslims view as unorthodox. Together with shrine pilgrimage, such rituals play a greater role in local Muslims' expression of Islam than regular prayer at mosques.

Many Muslims do not regularly attend mosques; however, the overwhelming majority of the population identify themselves as "Muslim," and national identity is linked to Islam. (Turkmen society considers an individual to be born into an ethno-religious group.) Departures from the pattern are rare and either receive little support or are criticized. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert from Islam to other faiths are viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized, and ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups accused of disseminating religious material receive harsher treatment than members of other ethnic groups, particularly if they received financial support from foreign sources.

Despite strong ties between Islam and national identity, the society historically has been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs. For example, in the

early part of the 20th century, Ashgabat was a refuge for the Baha'i Faith escaping persecution in Iran, and a Baha'i temple was built in Ashgabat at that time. Government repression of minority religions does not reflect doctrinal or societal friction between the Muslim majority and minority religions. Rather, it reportedly reflects the Government's concern that the proliferation of nontraditional religions could undermine state control, promote civil unrest, facilitate undue influence by foreign interests, and destabilize the Government. There is also a societal distrust of foreign-based religions and the belief that Islam from outside the country is "Wahhabist"—extremist.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy representatives and Department of State officials raised cases of religious freedom abuses in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. The Embassy conveyed to the Government specific steps necessary in order for the country to improve its standing in regards to respect for freedom of religion. A visit in October 2004 by staff of the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom, who met with Government officials and members of faith groups, underscored the importance of the issue to the U.S. Government. In early March, the Counsel of the U.S. Helsinki Commission delivered specific points of concern to the Foreign Minister and the Acting Minister of Justice that the Government needed to address. U.S. Embassy representatives continued to encourage the Government to explain to local authorities—and encourage implementation of—presidential decrees and the laws passed in March 2004.

The Ambassador and Embassy officers raised specific reports of abuse and urged greater respect for religious freedom in meetings with the Foreign Ministry, including the Foreign Minister himself, Ministry of Justice, and CRA. Embassy officials also requested that the Government assist registered religious groups in finding places to hold services.

In November 2004, during Ramadan, the Ambassador held an Iftar to promote religious tolerance; members of the CRA, including the Mufti, attended.

The Ambassador and Embassy officers met regularly with the staff of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Center in Ashgabat and other diplomatic missions in order to maximize cooperation in monitoring abuses of and promoting greater respect for religious freedom.

Embassy officers regularly met with representatives of registered and unregistered religious groups to monitor their status, receive reports of abuse, and discuss measures to raise their cases with the Government. These representatives have been much more willing to meet with Embassy officials in light of the reduced registration requirements and elimination of criminal penalties for religious activities, another indication that, for some, the religious freedom situation is gradually improving.

UKRAINE

The 1996 Constitution and the 1991 law on Freedom of Conscience provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were isolated problems at the local level, at times as a result of local officials taking sides in conflicts between religious organizations. Religious groups of all beliefs flourished; however, some local officials at times impeded attempts by minority and nontraditional religions to register and to buy or lease property.

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. Registration and property restitution problems remained; however, the Government continued to facilitate the return of some communal properties.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were some exceptions, particularly during and after the 2004 Orange Revolution and, more generally, among leaders of rival branches of the same faith. There were isolated instances of anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic sentiments. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (All-Ukrainian Council) provided a forum to resolve disputes and discuss relevant legislation.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 603,700 square kilometers, and its population is 47.44 million. Estimates of those who consider themselves believers have varied widely. A nationwide survey conducted in 2003 by the Razumkov Center found that 75.2 percent considered themselves believers, 37.4 percent said they attended church, and 21.9 percent of the respondents said they did not believe in God. As of January 1, 2005, there were 29,699 registered religious organizations, including 28,481 registered religious communities; the Government estimated that there were approximately 1,106 unregistered religious communities. More than 90 percent of religiously active citizens are Christians, with the majority being Orthodox. Religious practice is generally strongest in the western part of the country.

In September 2004, the respected national newspaper "Den" published the results of a major poll on religious beliefs done by the All-Ukraine Sociological Service. Of the respondents who identified themselves as believers, 50.44 percent said they belonged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)-Kiev Patriarchate; 26.13 percent to the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate; 8.02 percent to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (sometimes referred to as the Uniate, Byzantine, or Eastern Rite Church); 7.21 percent to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; 2.19 percent belong to the Roman Catholic Church; 2.19 percent identified themselves as Protestants; 0.63 percent responded that they observed Jewish religious practices; and 3.2 percent said they belonged to unidentified "other denominations."

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) has 36 eparchies and 10,566 communities, most of which are located in the central, southern, and eastern parts of the country. Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) of Kiev heads the Church within the country. The UOC-MP, which has 8,936 clergy members, refers to itself as The Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP) was formed after independence and has been headed since 1995 by Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko), who was once the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine. The UOC-KP has 31 eparchies and 3,484 communities, approximately 60 percent of which are in the western part of the country. The UOC-KP is not recognized by the UOC-MP, which publicly refers to Patriarch Filaret as a "schismatic." The UOC-KP has 2,693 clergy members.

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) is the smallest of the three major Orthodox churches in the country; it was founded in 1919 in Kiev. Banned during the Soviet era, it was legalized in 1989 and has 12 eparchies and 1,172 communities, most of them in the western part of the country. The UAOC has 702 clergy members. In the interest of the possible future unification of the country's Orthodox churches, it did not name a Patriarch to succeed the late Patriarch Dmitriy. The UAOC is formally headed in Ukraine by Metropolitan Mefodiy of Ternopil and Podil; however, the large eparchies of Lviv, Rivne-Volyn, and Tavriya have officially broken relations with Mefodiy and have asked to be placed under the direct jurisdiction of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

The adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) constitute the second largest group of believers after the Christian Orthodox churches. The Council of Brest formed the Church in 1596 to unify Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers. Outlawed by the Soviet Union in 1946 and legalized in 1989, the UGCC was, during that period of time, the single largest banned religious community in the world. As of January 1, 2005, the UGCC had 18 eparchies, 3,386 communities, and 2,103 clergy members. The UGCC's members, who constituted a majority of the believers in the west, numbered approximately 4 million.

The Roman Catholic Church is traditionally associated with historical pockets of citizens of Polish ancestry who live mainly in the central and western regions. The Roman Catholic Church has 11 dioceses, 870 communities, and 484 clergy members serving approximately 1 million persons.

Protestant Churches have grown rapidly in the years since independence. The Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine (the Baptist Union) is the largest group, claiming over 500,000 members in approximately 2,552 organizations. The Baptist Union has 2,394 communities and 3,069 clergy members. Other growing communities include Anglicans, Calvinists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, Mormons, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, and others.

The Jewish community has a long history in the country. Estimates on the size of the current Jewish population vary. According to the State Committee of Statistics, the Jewish population during the 2001 census was estimated at 103,600, al-

though some Jewish community leaders have said the number may be as high as 300,000. The All-Ukraine Sociological Service poll appears to corroborate this higher figure. Observers believe that 35 to 40 percent of the Jewish population is active communally; there are 240 registered Jewish organizations.

Emigration to Israel and the West decreases the size of the Jewish population each year by 14,000 to 21,000. In addition, the average age of Jews in the country is approximately 60; local Jewish leaders and foreign observers estimated that approximately 9 deaths occur for every birth in the community. Despite these demographic indicators, Jewish life continues to flourish, due to an increase of rabbis entering the country since independence, an increased proportion of Jews practicing their faith, and an increased willingness of individuals to openly identify themselves as Jewish. Most observant Jews are Orthodox. There are 101 Chabad-Lubavitch communities in the country. The Progressive (Reform) Jewish movement has 50 communities.

Some observers estimate that there are 2 million Muslims in the country, although most estimates are substantially lower, around 500,000. There are 457 registered Muslim communities, 320 of them on the Crimean peninsula. Sheikh Akhmed Tamim, the Mufti of Ukraine, is a member of the All-Ukrainian Council. According to Sheikh Tamim, approximately 50,000 Muslims, mostly foreign, live in Kiev. The majority of the country's Muslims are Crimean Tatars, who were forcibly deported from Crimea to Uzbekistan by Stalin in 1944; they were permitted to begin returning home in 1989. There are approximately 300,000 Crimean Tatars in Ukraine; 267,000 live on the peninsula.

The Government estimated that there are more than 15 nontraditional religious movements in the country. As of January 1, 2005, 28 Krishna Consciousness communities and 43 Buddhist communities were registered.

According to the Government, as of January 1, 2005, there were 173 theological educational institutions with 9,494 full-time and 10,277 correspondence students. Foreign religious workers are active in many faiths and denominations. The Government estimated that approximately 51 percent of priests in the Roman Catholic community are foreign citizens. Foreign religious workers also play a particularly active role in Protestant and Mormon communities, where missionary activity is central to community growth. The Jewish community also depends on foreign religious workers; many rabbis are not Ukrainian citizens. In 2004, 11,978 foreign religious workers were officially invited to the country, including 6,658 U.S. citizens. According to the Government, no visa applications by foreign religious workers were rejected during 2004.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The 1996 Constitution and the 1991 law on Freedom of Conscience provide for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Generally speaking, the government strives at all levels to protect this right, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. However, some minority and nontraditional religions have experienced difficulties in registration and in buying and leasing property.

The country officially celebrates numerous religious holidays, including Christmas, Easter Monday, and Holy Trinity Day, all according to the Julian calendar shared by Orthodox and Greek Catholics.

The law requires that to obtain the status of a "juridical entity," a religious organization must register its "articles and statutes" either as a local or national organization. Membership of at least 10 adults is required. Registration is necessary to conduct many day-to-day business activities including publishing, banking, and property transactions. Registration is also necessary to be considered for restitution of communal religious property. By law, the registration process should take 1 month, or 3 months if the Government requests an expert opinion on the legitimacy of a group applying for registration. Denial of registration may be appealed in court.

The registration process is currently in the midst of significant change sparked by the Orange Revolution and the election of President Viktor Yushchenko. In the past, the Soviet-legacy State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA) was the government entity responsible for registering religious organizations and, more broadly, for implementing state policy on religion. The SCRA's headquarters was in Kiev; it maintained representatives in all regional centers, as well as in the autonomous cities of Kiev and Sevastopol.

In the past, national religious organizations were required to register with the SCRA, and then to register each local affiliate with the local office of the SCRA in the oblast where the affiliate was located. In practice, the average registration pe-

riod was 3 months, though registration could occasionally take 6 months or more for cases in which the SCRA required additional expert evaluation. For example, in 2004 the Progressive Jewish Community reported that its application for registration in Kharkiv took a year before being approved.

The media reported that President Yushchenko abolished the SCRA by presidential decree on April 22, 2005, transferring the SCRA's functions to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the State Secretariat. The move was cautiously welcomed by representatives of many major religious organizations, NGOs, and think tanks, who generally viewed the SCRA as an antiquated, corrupt, Soviet-style organization. Some major religious organizations criticized the move, noting that the SCRA, while flawed, played a valuable role as the religious community's "voice" in the government, helping to mediate disputes, for example, between religious organizations and various government agencies.

The process of transferring the SCRA's functions to the MoJ and the State Secretariat has moved slowly. The media reported on May 18 that the Cabinet of Ministers has set up a commission to determine how to carry out the transfer; the commission is headed by SCRA Chairman Viktor Bondarenko and is required to "inform the Cabinet of Ministers about its work" in three months. As of June 2005, the SCRA generally continued to function as it did before. The organization appeared to have simply been renamed the "State Department for Religious Issues" and formally subordinated to the MoJ.

Major religious organizations have expressed concern about the opaque way in which the SCRA was abolished and how its duties will eventually be divided between the MoJ and State Secretariat. Specifically, religious organizations have expressed concern that the process has proceeded without their input. While the Justice Minister has pledged to "take the politics" out of the registration process and bring Ukrainian law into conformity with European norms, religious organizations remained skeptical, complaining that they have little specific information about what the SCRA's successor organization will actually do.

Major religious organizations were also concerned that the SCRA's successor organization may not continue the SCRA practice of frequently consulting with the All-Ukrainian Council, whose membership represents the faiths of over 90 percent of the religiously active population. The All-Ukrainian Council meets once every 2 or 3 months and has a rotating chairmanship. Representative members also use the council as a means of discussing potential problems between religious faiths. The council also has provided a forum through which religious organizations can consult with the Government on relevant draft legislation. President Yushchenko held his first meeting with the council on June 14, 2005.

Representatives of some small religious organizations complained that the SCRA has excluded them from the All-Ukrainian Council because they refused to pay cash bribes solicited by senior SCRA officials.

There is no formal state religion; informally, however, the UOC-MP and the UGCC tend to dominate in the east and west of the country respectively. Local authorities tended to side with the religious majority in a particular region, taking the side of the UOC-MP in many areas of the country, and supporting the UGCC in the western part of the country.

President Yushchenko has, since taking office, spoken publicly about his vision of a Ukraine in which religious freedom flourishes and people are genuinely free to worship as they please. In addition, the president said in a March 24 media interview that his government would not "directly involve itself in ecclesiastical matters." Yushchenko has, however, spoken out in support of creating a unified Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The UOC-MP reiterated at a March Holy Synod that it opposes "mechanical" unification with what it calls the "non-canonical" UOC-KP.

Officially, religion must be kept out of the public school curriculum. However, President Yushchenko, with the support of the country's four top Christian clergymen, announced on June 29 that he would instruct the Ministry of Education to introduce training in "the ethics of faith" into public schools beginning September 1, 2005. While Jewish leaders support the teaching of ethics and civics in school, they have insisted on a nonsectarian approach to this training—an approach which President Yushchenko has said he shares. Schools run by religious communities may, and do, include religious education as an extracurricular activity.

In June 2004, then-President Kuchma signed into law the amendments to the Law on Alternative (Non-Military) Service, adopted by the Supreme Rada in May 2004. The amended bill stipulates that the term of alternative service "shall be 1.5 times the duration of active military duty." Christian symbols and ceremonies are routinely used in the armed forces.

According to the law, religious organizations maintain a privileged status as the only organizations permitted to seek restitution of communal property confiscated

by the Soviet regime. During the period covered by this report, most buildings and objects subject to restitution were those immediately necessary for religious worship. Communities must apply to regional authorities. While the consideration of a claim should be completed within a month, it frequently takes much longer.

Intra-communal competition for particular properties complicates the restitution issue for the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities. The slow pace of restitution is also a reflection of the country's difficult economic situation, which severely limited funds available for the relocation of the occupants of seized religious property. Some groups asserted that there was progress in the restitution of property, while others reported a lack of progress. Many properties for which restitution is sought are occupied, often by state institutions, or are historical landmarks. All major religious organizations called on the Government to establish a transparent legal process to address legitimate restitution claims.

According to the Government, as of January 1, 2005, religious organizations in Ukraine were using 20,607 places of worship, of which approximately 6,100 were rented. In 2004, 632 religious buildings and premises, including 14 architectural heritage sites, were transferred into ownership or use to religious organizations. As of January 1, 2005, 2,445 religious buildings were under construction. During the period 1992–2004, Government funds and donations were used to construct 4,398 places of worship. Representatives of the Jewish and Baptist communities have complained, however, that state funds are only allocated for Orthodox church buildings. The Government has not allocated funds for the construction or reconstruction of synagogues, for example.

Muslim leaders and representatives of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis acknowledged that, during the period covered by this report, the Crimean Government took steps to promote interfaith understanding through interfaith dialogue between Muslims and the UOC–MP. However, Muslim leaders and Mejlis members asserted that the efforts have not been successful.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government continued to facilitate the building of houses of worship; however, members of numerous communities described difficulties in dealing with the municipal administrations in Kiev and other large cities to obtain land and building permits. These problems were not limited to religious groups.

The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious organizations and narrowly defines the permissible activities of members of the clergy, preachers, teachers, and other non-citizen representatives of foreign-based religious organizations; however, in practice there were no reports that the Government used the law to limit the activity of such religious organizations. Religious worker visas require invitations from registered religious organizations in the country and the approval of the Government. Foreign religious workers may preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities “only in those religious organizations which invited them to Ukraine and with official approval of the governmental body that registered the statutes and the articles of the pertinent religious organization.”

At times, local governments in regions that are traditionally dominated by one religious group discriminated against rival religious groups in restituting property and granting registration. For example, representatives of the UOC–KP, the UAOC, the UGCC, and the Roman Catholic Church alleged that the Kuchma administration, as well as local governments in the east, favored the UOC–MP in matters of property restitution and registration. Similarly, representatives of Progressive Jewish communities have noted that the government of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast has only permitted the registration of Chabad communities.

Senior leaders of the UOC–MP complained that, in the wake of the Orange Revolution and the election of President Yushchenko, the UOC–MP has been discriminated against by the Rivne and Volyn oblast governments. In particular, the UOC–MP has alleged that Rivne Governor Vasyl Chervoniy illegally issued orders in April transferring control of a UOC–MP church in Mylostiv village to the UOC–KP. UOC–MP representatives also asserted that local officials and UOC–KP supporters in Rivne Oblast have repeatedly threatened UOC–MP clergy and their family members.

The UOC–MP has also protested legal action initiated by the Sumy Oblast government on February 21; local officials there are seeking to de-register the UOC–MP for alleged violations of criminal law.

Representatives from the UOC–KP complained that some local governments in oblasts with strong UOC–MP representation, including the Odessa and Poltava oblasts, deliberately delayed registration of congregations that, in accordance with the law, had changed jurisdictions from the UOC–MP to the UOC–KP. Representa-

tives from the UOC–KP also noted that local governments failed to return UOC–KP church buildings in Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Zhytomyr.

Representatives of the UGCC complained of discrimination by the Odesa municipal government, which blocked the Church’s efforts to obtain land in the city.

Greek Catholic Cardinal Husar, as well as prominent members of Ukraine’s Jewish community, called on the government to amend Ukrainian education law, which prohibits religious organizations (for example, the UGCC) from establishing and running primary and secondary schools.

Despite requests from the Roman Catholic Church, including the Pope, the Government has not yet transferred its ownership of St. Nicholas’ Cathedral and a former residence of Roman Catholic bishops in Kiev to the Church. The Church was, however, permitted to use the cathedral for daily morning Mass, on weekends, and during major religious holidays. Roman Catholic representatives also expressed frustration about unrealized restitution claims in Odesa, Mykolayiv, Sevastopol, Simferopol, Bila Tserkva, Uman, Zhytomyr, and Kiev.

Although evangelical Protestant groups have expressed concerns in the past about possible government discrimination against individual believers of non-native religions, evangelical Protestant leaders indicated that their members reported no such discrimination during the period covered by this report.

There continue to be charges by representatives of the Jewish community that religious land is being used inappropriately. For example, there was no progress in a high-profile and long-running dispute over a Jewish cemetery in the Volyn Oblast town of Volodymyr-Volynsky. In December 2002, a local court ordered a halt in the construction of an apartment building at the site. However, according to the Volodymyr-Volynsky Municipal Council, apartment construction was completed during 2003, and most of the units were occupied. Local Jewish groups complain that the SCRA and the Ministry of Justice continue to refuse to help resolve this dispute. In addition, in June 2005, a hospital in the Ternopil Oblast town of Chortkiv carried out unauthorized construction work in part of a 17th century Jewish cemetery. According to Jewish community leaders, the work was done despite a specific warning from the oblast administration that the cemetery was a protected historical heritage site.

Representatives of the Muslim community, both in Kiev and in Crimea, noted that they have had difficulty registering communities; for example, the Kharkiv Oblast government has, for the past 11 years, refused to register a Muslim community. In addition, Islamic community leaders have also expressed frustration with the Ministry of Education, which has yet to register a single Islamic school.

More broadly, representatives of the Muslim community complained that the Government’s slow pace of communal property restitution undermined moderate Muslim leaders. A lack of results, they argued, made Muslims—particularly in Crimea—more willing to listen to people with strident views, especially those espoused by followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Muslim community leaders complained, in particular, about unresolved restitution claims involving a 118-year-old mosque in Mykolayiv, a famed mosque in Dnipropetrovsk, as well as a 150-year-old mosque in the Crimean town of Masandra and the ruins of an 18th-century mosque in Crimean coastal city of Alushta.

The media reported on May 20, 2005, that members of the Buddhist community staged a protest outside the headquarters of the security service (commonly known by its local acronym “SBU”). They criticized the SBU for the May 4 detention of a Japanese Buddhist monk, Dzunsay Teresava-san, at a crossing point on the border with Poland. The Japanese monk was taken off a train, had his visa revoked, was banned from entering the country for 5 years, and deported back to Poland. According to press reports, the monk is on a Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) “black list” because of his outspoken criticism of Russian military operations in Chechnya. The media reported on May 30 that the ban was lifted and the Japanese monk has been given a visa.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

There were several improvements in respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

President Yushchenko has spoken repeatedly and publicly, beginning with his inaugural address, about the need for Ukrainians to be free to worship as they choose. Yushchenko also publicly pledged on January 24 not to interfere in church affairs.

In addition, President Yushchenko, whose father was imprisoned at Auschwitz, has publicly denounced anti-Semitism and xenophobia. For example, at a January 27 ceremony in Poland marking the 60th anniversary of Auschwitz's liberation, Yushchenko declared that Ukraine would never again have a "so-called Jewish Question." Jewish community representatives welcomed the president's commitment to combating anti-Semitism; however, some critics in the community noted that Yushchenko has spoken against anti-Semitism in Poland and before the U.S. Congress—but not yet before parliament. President Yushchenko reiterated his commitment to combating anti-Semitism during a May meeting with leaders of the United Jewish Communities/American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and during a June meeting with the Chairman and Executive Director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

Although progress was modest, the Government continued to return some communal properties expropriated during the Soviet era to religious groups. For example, during the period covered by this report, the Government returned Mosques in the Crimean cities of Sudak and Feodosiya; a synagogue in the Crimean city of Yevpatoriya to the Progressive Jewish community; Uspensky Cathedral in Kharkiv to the UOC-MP; and, an unidentified Orthodox church building in Sevastopol to the UOC-MP.

In addition, the government celebrated the completed refurbishment of Svyatohirska Monastery in Donetsk Oblast and the UOC-MP's decision to elevate the monastery to the status of "Lavra," one of only three such sites in the country.

At the instruction of the Cabinet of Ministers, a special commission continued to operate in Kiev to settle issues pertaining to the use of premises and territory of the nearly 1,000-year-old Upper and Lower Lavra of the Kiev-Pechersk National Historical and Architectural Preserve and the male monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God. The commission has developed mechanisms to return former church premises and other property for use by the Kiev-based St. Iona, St. Florus and Laurus, and St. Panteleymon monasteries of the UOC-MP. The commission has also formed a working group to address the issues pertaining to further use and preservation of sacred buildings in the Pochayiv Lavra monastery complex in Ternopil Oblast.

In June 2005, local authorities in Kremenchuk, Poltava Oblast, finally fulfilled a longstanding pledge to provide a plot of land to the local Roman Catholic community for the construction of a church.

By the end of the period covered in this report, the Government was also preparing to transfer control of the Saint Cyril Church in Kiev, Church of the Seven Holy Martyrs in Simferopol, and former monastery premises in Starokostyantyniv, Khmelnytsky Oblast, to the UOC-MP. They were also preparing to transfer control of the Dominican Cathedral and a former church building in Lviv, as well as the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin Mary in Ivano-Frankivsk, to the Roman Catholic Church. They also prepared to transfer a religious building in Balta, Odesa Oblast, to the Russian Old Rite Orthodox Church; and, a building on Khmelnytsky Street in Kiev to the Baptist Union.

The Government has also instructed the State Property Fund and Ministry of Foreign Affairs to continue to assist the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation in resolving a dispute with the Monastery of the Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple (UOC-MP) over the use of former monastery property.

Jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Border Guard Committee, State Customs Service, State Committee for Tourism, and other agencies, the SCRA held several working meetings, including site visits, to support Jewish pilgrimages to the burial site of Nakhman Tsadyk in Uman.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, conflicts between local representatives of contending religious organizations in some cases adversely affected broader ties among religions in society.

Political events, particularly those that occurred during and after the 2004 presidential election campaign and Orange Revolution, served to increase religious tensions. Generally speaking, the leaders of most major religious organizations re-

mained above the political fray and urged their congregations to pray, for example, for free and fair elections. The major exception was the UOC–MP, which nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), analysts, and the UOC–KP said openly sided with the government-backed candidate, then-Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich.

According to NGOs and media reports, priests in UOC–MP churches in the eastern part of the country actively campaigned for Yanukovich, reading special prayers for the Prime Minister and urging the faithful to vote for him. Other observers noted that this campaigning by UOC–MP priests also occurred in other parts of the country, including Kiev. Senior UOC–MP leaders in Donetsk Oblast reportedly told parishioners that then-opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko was a “servant of the devil” and distributed material claiming that Yushchenko’s disfigured face—the result of a near-fatal poisoning by dioxin—was divine punishment for allegedly plotting to “betray Orthodoxy.” In December 2004, the Fifth Channel television program “Forbidden Zone” featured audio recordings of senior UOC–MP officials in Donetsk Oblast haggling with Yanukovich campaign leaders over how much the UOC–MP would be paid for denouncing Yushchenko.

The UOC–MP’s Metropolitan for Donetsk, Ilarion, was on the stage at a pro-Yanukovich conference in Luhansk Oblast that raised the specter of separatism when it became clear that Yanukovich would not be declared president on the basis of the fraudulent second round of the presidential election in November 2004. A UOC–MP bishop in Uzhhorod also publicly endorsed Yanukovich.

On January 12, following Yushchenko’s victory in the presidential election, senior representatives of the UOC–MP claimed at a Kiev press conference that the UOC–MP had not officially sided with one candidate during the election process. Representatives of the UOC–KP, among others, publicly rejected that assertion. At that January 12 press conference, UOC–MP representatives also claimed that “many denominations” had permitted political campaigning in their churches during the presidential elections, a phenomenon that the UOC–MP attributed to “politicized inter-confessional relations” in the country. However, the UOC–MP offered no evidence of political campaigning in other churches.

During the period covered by this report, the debate intensified regarding possible unification of some or all of the three main Orthodox Churches (UOC–MP, UOC–KP, and UAOC) and granting the UOC–KP canonical status as an autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church. After a March 24 meeting with President Yushchenko, a senior representative of Orthodoxy’s “First Among Equals,” Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, announced to the press that: “The position of the Mother Church, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, is that . . . the 1686 subjugation of the Kyivan Metropolia to the Moscow Patriarchate was concluded by Ecumenical Patriarch Dionysius without the agreement of or ratification of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Great Church of Christ, the Patriarchate of Constantinople.”

Representatives of the UOC–MP dismissed the statement as reflecting only the personal view of the representative, Archbishop Vsevolod, and not the Ecumenical Patriarch himself. However, UOC–KP representatives and analysts argued that the statement indicates Bartholomew may be preparing to formally rule that the 1686 decision placing the territory of Ukraine under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church was non-canonical—not in keeping with church rules—and therefore should not stand. Such a ruling would be a major step in granting the UOC–KP autocephalic (independent) status, making it an ecclesiastical equal to the UOC–MP.

UOC–MP representatives claimed that, emboldened by the Orange Revolution, the election of President Yushchenko, and Archbishop Vsevolod’s public statement on March 24, supporters of the UOC–KP have attacked UOC–MP clergy and seized a number of UOC–MP churches—allegedly with the assistance of local police at times.

Specifically, the UOC–MP alleged that on January 9, 2005, people presumed to be UOC–KP supporters shot at (but apparently did not injure) the senior UOC–MP priest of St. Nicholas’ church in Myrne village, Rivne Oblast and on February 8, UOC–KP supporters set fire to UOC–MP property in Poliske village, Rivne Oblast. Furthermore, they allege that on February 23, the UOC–MP received a letter from the governor of Kherson Oblast announcing that UOC–KP congregations must be allowed to worship in several UOC–MP churches on a rotational basis; and on March 6 and 8, local authorities incited the violent seizure of the UOC–MP’s Holy Trinity church in Rokhmaniv village, Ternopil Oblast. During the incident, a UOC–MP priest suffered “serious bodily injury.” According to the UOC–MP, the injured priest subsequently conducted a 57-day hunger strike to protest a Ternopil Appellate Court decision that UOC–MP and UOC–KP congregations be permitted to worship in the church on a rotational basis. Then, on March 17, UOC–KP supporters

used “violent means” to seize St. Michael’s church in Kostyntsi village, Chernivtsi Oblast; and on April 10, UOC–KP supporters attempted to seize the UOC–MP’s Chapel of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Lukhche village, Volyn Oblast. The alleged incidents continued on April 23, when a group of 60 UOC–KP “militants,” with the support of local police, seized a UOC–MP church in Tarashcha, Kiev Oblast; and, then on April 24, UOC–KP supporters injured UOC–MP parishioners while trying to seize a church in Shubranets village, Chernivtsi Oblast.

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) also voiced complaints about the UOC–KP, specifically asserting that UOC–KP believers had seized, with the help of local police officials, ROCA’s Holy Trinity church in Odessa Oblast. ROCA was involved in a separate dispute with the UOC–KP over ownership of St. George’s Church, also in Odessa Oblast.

In addition, ROCA representatives complained of pressure from the UOC–MP to surrender church buildings to the UOC–MP in Malyn, Zhytomyr Oblast.

The Interior Minister on May 25, 2005, denied that local police were taking sides in church property disputes. The Ministry had instructed police officers to maintain peace and stability in cases of conflict between UOC–MP and UOC–KP supporters; the police were under orders to remain impartial and to prevent the seizure or destruction of church property. For example, he said, local police had in May prevented the seizure of a UOC–MP monastery in Rivne Oblast by UOC–KP believers. The Minister emphasized that it was the policy of the Yushchenko government to treat all religions equally.

Tensions remained between some adherents of the UGCC and the UOC–MP over control of property in the western part of the country, which is a legacy of the forced reunification of these two churches under the Soviet regime. For example, the UOC–MP complained that it was informed on April 6, 2005, by the government of Zakarpattia Oblast that it must vacate churches in the villages of Korolevo, Sasovo, Cherna, Veryatsya, Khyzha and Kelechyn; the church buildings were to be turned over to the UGCC.

The UOC–MP also publicly accused the UGCC of attempting to expand in regions where traditionally the Moscow Patriarchate was strong, though the UOC–MP offered no proof to back up its claims. The UOC–MP opposed plans of the UGCC to establish a patriarchate, and strongly criticized Cardinal Husar’s decision to move his headquarters from Lviv to Kiev by December 2005.

Leaders of the Baptist Union criticized the UOC–MP for continuing its practice of publicly referring to Baptists with the pejorative Ukrainian word “sectanty” (“sectarians”).

Muslims leaders in Crimea, as well as members of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, accused the UOC–MP of encouraging anti-Muslim and anti-Tatar violence in Crimea. UOC–MP priests in Crimea reportedly have assured ethnic Russian vigilantes, who refer to themselves as Cossacks, that violence against Muslim Tatars was justified in order to “protect Orthodoxy” in Crimea.

Mejlis members and Crimea-based human rights groups also criticized the Crimean Government for permitting schools to use textbooks that contain inflammatory and historically inaccurate material about Tatar Muslims. Human rights activists specifically noted that a popular textbook for fifth graders, Viktor Misan’s “Stories on the History of Ukraine,” contains more than 20 pejorative references to Muslims, including the canard that Tatar children had frequently used “elderly and disabled Ukrainian captives for archery and saber practice.” Similarly, A.K. Shchvidko’s 8th-grade textbook, “History of Ukraine, 16–18th Centuries,” depicts Muslims in a negative light, erroneously asserting, for example, that “there wasn’t a year when Tatars didn’t invade Ukraine, burn its villages and towns, slaughter its citizens, and take prisoners.” One major Crimea-based human rights group noted that such misinformation collectively creates an impression among young people that “Tatars are bad for Ukraine and that to kill and rob them is a blessed deed.”

Crimean Tatar representatives continued to demand the removal of a large market from the territory of an old Muslim cemetery in the Crimean town of Bakhchisaray.

There were acts of anti-Semitism during the period covered by this report. However, the Jewish community was split over whether to characterize anti-Semitism as “on the rise” in the country.

On June 13, 2005, a swastika, anti-Semitic graffiti, and a slogan describing President Yushchenko as “an enemy of Ukraine” were painted near the entrance to the Ha-Tikvah Jewish Center in Kiev.

The notorious Inter-Regional Academy of Personnel Management sponsored a June 3, 2005 conference in Kiev at which speakers reportedly called for the deportation of all Jews from Ukraine. According to Jewish leaders, a UOC–MP priest participated in this conference.

On May 2, 2005, vandals painted a swastika and threatening, offensive words on the walls of the Kotsyubinsky Street synagogue in Dnipropetrovsk.

According to a report by the AEN news agency, a group calling itself the "Party of National Patriots" handed out approximately 1,000 leaflets in Donetsk's Lenin Square on May 9, 2005, calling for the murder of Jews. Specifically, the leaflets called for "death by shooting" for "conspirators and leaders of international Zionist political and religious organizations acting on the territory of Ukraine."

On March 28, 2005, a small, openly anti-Semitic political party officially registered with the Government. The Ukrainian Conservative Party's charter calls for "a struggle against Zionism and fascism" and a return to the Soviet-era practice of indicating a person's ethnicity on their passport.

On March 22, 2005, the synagogue in the Odesa Oblast city of Izmail was vandalized. Anti-Semitic slogans written in German, as well as swastikas, were painted on the synagogue's doors and walls.

On March 17, 2005, vandals painted a large swastika on the Brodsky synagogue in Kiev.

The media reported on February 26, 2005, that renowned accordion player Jan Tabachnyk, who is Jewish, accused Deputy Prime Minister Mykola Tomenko of making anti-Semitic comments about him. Tomenko had said in a radio interview that "Ukrainian artists, and not simply some Tabachnyks or Kobzons" (a reference to Jewish Russian entertainer Iosif Kobzon) should perform in Ukraine. According to press reports on March 23, Tomenko explained that he meant that the Yushchenko government would support all artists, regardless of their political affiliations and ethnicity; the Kuchma-era practice of selective support for entertainers in exchange for declarations of political support would be ended. The Jewish community was split over whether Tomenko's comments were anti-Semitic in nature.

On February 1, 2005, a synagogue in Ivano-Frankivsk was vandalized. According to a report by the AEN news agency, vandals shattered several windows and painted swastikas on the building.

Police in Simferopol were continuing to investigate a January 8, 2005, incident in which a group of skinheads assaulted 13 students from a Chabad Jewish day school. Two of the students, girls aged 11 and 16, required hospitalization; one had a concussion, and another had a broken nose.

In early August 2004, two rabbis were attacked in central Odesa by three men who witnesses say were obviously drunk. The rabbis fought off their assailants with the help of some bystanders. Police captured one of the alleged perpetrators, who while being interrogated told police he wanted to kill Jews. Police have not found the other assailants.

At the end of August 2004, Chaim Dubnov, a Donetsk yeshiva student, was walking with his family in the center of Donetsk when a group of youths chanting anti-Semitic insults surrounded them, knocked Dubnov to the ground and kicked him several times. He was hospitalized with head injuries.

Also in late August 2004, police informed the media that 21 gravestones had been vandalized in the Donetske More cemetery in Donetsk Oblast. Four neo-Nazis were sentenced on February 7, 2005, for the crime; according to media reports, the local Jewish community requested light sentences for the vandals, who came from extremely poor families. The two adult defendants were given suspended sentences, and the two underage defendants were sentenced to "compulsory educational measures" to be supervised by their parents.

In a separate incident, also in August 2004, the media reported that 15 additional gravestones in the same cemetery were vandalized. The number "666" (according to some, a Biblical mark of Satan) had been spray-painted on some of the overturned gravestones. Local police have not found the perpetrator(s).

In July 2004, a rabbi was assaulted near Kiev's Brodsky Synagogue, according to a report by the MIGnews.com web site and the newspaper Fakti. In another July 2004 incident, Rabbi Chaim Pikovsky was walking to a synagogue dressed in traditional Orthodox Jewish clothing when, according to the police, at least one unidentified "hooligan" approached Pikovsky, insulted him, and then struck him. According to Pikovsky's lawyer, the police investigated the attack and detained a suspect; that suspect was later released because of a lack of evidence.

In July 2004, the media reported that the then-main opposition bloc in parliament, Our Ukraine, expelled Oleh Tyahnybok, a Member of Parliament (M.P.) who made an anti-Semitic speech during a campaign rally in Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast. A regional court ordered that charges of inciting ethnic hatred be dropped because of a lack of sufficient legal grounds to open a criminal case. Moreover, in a March 29, 2005 national television interview, Tyahnybok refused to apologize for his campaign speech.

A dispute between nationalists and Jews over the erection of crosses in an old Jewish cemetery in Sambir remained unresolved, despite mediation efforts by local Jewish and Greek Catholic leaders.

Police were continuing to investigate the May 2004 vandalism of several dozen tombstones, at Jewish and Christian burial sites, at the Kurenivske Cemetery in Kiev.

According to the Rivne Oblast Jewish Council, municipal authorities restored the desecrated Sosonky memorial in Rivne. In April 2004, Jewish community activists discovered that vandals were removing gold from the mass graves of Jews killed there by the Nazis.

There have still been no arrests for the 2002 vandalism of a Holocaust memorial in Zhytomyr.

Anti-Semitic articles appear frequently in small publications and irregular newsletters, although such articles rarely appear in the national press.

The most infamous purveyor of anti-Semitic material in the country is the allegedly Libyan and Palestinian Government-funded Inter-Regional Academy of Personnel Management, known in Ukrainian as MAUP, which publishes the monthly journal "Personnel" and the weekly newspaper "Personnel Plus." Observers estimate that these publications run at least one major anti-Semitic article each month. For example, Personnel Plus published in its April 14–19, 2005 edition an "open letter" to President Yushchenko, Rada Speaker Lytvyn and Supreme Court Chief Justice Malyarenko calling for a parliamentary investigation into the "criminal activities of organized Jewry in Ukraine." Personnel Plus claimed this letter was signed by more than "100 scientific, civic, and political leaders" including two M.P.s, one of whom (Oleh Tyahnybok) was kicked out of the Our Ukraine parliamentary faction because of his anti-Semitic views.

The Jewish community has received support from government officials in criticizing articles in Personnel and Personnel Plus. For example, State Secretary Oleksandr Zinchenko issued a statement on April 22, 2005, on behalf of the Presidential Secretariat denouncing the "open letter" and condemning "any manifestations of anti-Semitism." In addition, Zinchenko forcefully repeated the key points of his public statement on national radio news programs April 22–23, 2005.

Despite a March 2004 lawsuit filed by the State Committee for Nationalities and Migration, the Lviv-based "Idealist" newspaper continued publication of anti-Semitic articles.

As of June 2005, the trial of the popular Socialist Party newspaper Silski Visti remained ongoing. The newspaper was appealing a lower court ruling that it be closed for fomenting inter-ethnic hatred by publishing at least two anti-Semitic advertisements. At the end of the period covered by this report, Silski Visti was still publishing normally. On March 11, 2005, President Yushchenko presented government awards to several Silski Visti employees in connection with the paper's 85th anniversary celebration.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. A majority of foreign religious workers are U.S. citizens, and the Embassy continued to intervene as necessary to defend their rights to due process under the law.

The Ambassador, as well as other Embassy officers, demonstrated the U.S. Government's concern for religious freedom by maintaining an ongoing dialogue with government and religious leaders on this topic, as well as by attending significant religious events in the country.

During the period covered by this report, Embassy officers continued to maintain close contact not only with clerics but also with lay leaders in religious communities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations, such as Caritas, Sokhnut, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, which are active in the country. In addition, the Embassy facilitated similar meetings with such groups for Members of Congress and other visiting U.S. officials.

Embassy officers tracked developments in religious freedom court cases involving different denominations. For example, the Embassy closely monitored the Sambir and Volodymyr-Volynsky cemetery cases, raising them with the Volyn Oblast government, the SCRA, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister's office, and the Presidential Administration.

Numerous times over the course of the reporting period, the Ambassador raised the Sambir and Volodymyr-Volynsky cases, as well as the broader issues of communal property restitution and preservation, in meetings with senior government of-

officials including the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Justice Minister and Transportation Minister (who serves as the president's informal liaison with the Jewish community).

Embassy officers met with Muslim leaders in Kiev and Crimea throughout the period covered by this report in an effort to understand the concerns of those communities. The Ambassador also hosted an Iftar to celebrate Ramadan in Kiev.

In September 2004, an Embassy officer attended the annual pilgrimage of Breslover Hasidic Jews to the burial site of their sect's founder in Uman.

In November and December 2004, the Ambassador raised with government officials, including the Prosecutor General, a dispute between the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) and the UOC-KP over ownership of St. George's church in Odesa.

During February 14–19, 2005, the Embassy's Speaker Program featured renowned Baptist Minister Dr. Elbert Ransom, who talked to audiences in Kiev, Mykolayiv, and Simferopol about the role of religious organizations in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

On March 29, 2005, the Ambassador attended the signing of a major agreement between the U.S. National Holocaust Museum and the Ukrainian National Archives that gives Holocaust Museum researchers continued access to important documents. The Embassy also hosted a reception for this event.

On May 25, 2005, the Ambassador raised with the Interior Minister complaints by the UOC-MP that UOC-KP supporters were seeking to take over UOC-MP church property, urging the minister to review reports that police had, in some cases, sided with the UOC-KP. The Ambassador specifically highlighted a case in which UOC-KP believers seized ROCA's Holy Trinity church in Odesa Oblast. During April and May, 2005 visits to Lviv, Embassy officers met with various denominations in an effort to better understand inter-confessional relationships in western Ukraine and problems facing both the UGCC and Roman Catholic Church.

During June 2–4, 2005, Dean Koldenhoven, winner of a Kennedy "Profiles in Courage" Award, spoke to students, NGOs, and journalists in Kiev about his experience fighting religious intolerance while mayor of Palos Heights, Illinois.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy approved an eight-month grant to Ukrainian Catholic University to monitor religious freedom in the country. The Embassy also approved International Visitors Program proposals focusing on Islam, the promotion of interfaith dialogue, and how religious organizations are treated under U.S. law at the national, state, and local levels. Participants in these three programs are expected to travel to the U.S. by the end of 2005.

In Washington, representatives of the Department of State and representatives of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Cultural Heritage Abroad met with various government officials and religious leaders during the year.

UNITED KINGDOM

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. Centuries-old sectarian divisions and instances of violence persisted in Northern Ireland.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The United Kingdom has an area of 94,525 square miles, and its population in mid-2003 was approximately 59.6 million. The 2001 census for the whole of the United Kingdom reported that approximately 42 million persons (almost 72 percent of the population) identify themselves as Christians. Approximately 1.6 million (2.7 percent) identify themselves as Muslims. The next largest religious groups are Hindus (1 percent), followed by Sikhs (0.6 percent) and Jews (0.5 percent). More than 9 million (15.5 percent) of respondents stated they have no religion. The census's religion question was voluntary, and only 7.3 percent chose not to respond.

Religious affiliation is not evenly distributed among ethnicities. In 2001 census data for Great Britain, approximately 70 percent of the white population described

themselves as Christians. Almost 75 percent of black Caribbean respondents stated that they were Christians, as did 70 percent of black Africans. Meanwhile, 45 percent of Indians were Hindus, and 29 percent were Sikhs. Approximately 92 percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were Muslims.

Non-Christian populations are concentrated in London and other large urban areas. London is home to 56 percent of Jews, 52 percent of Hindus, 38 percent of Muslims, and 31 percent of Sikhs. Census figures showed that Muslims, as compared to adherents of other religions, had higher rates of unemployment and ill health and lower rates of educational qualifications.

Information on membership in Christian denominations was not recorded in the 2001 census. In 2003, the Office for National Statistics indicated approximately 29 percent of the population identify with Anglicanism, 10 percent with the Roman Catholic Church, and 14 percent with other Christian churches. An additional 2 percent of the population is affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Church of Christ, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarians.

In Northern Ireland, the 2001 Census showed that 53.1 percent were Protestants and 43.8 percent were Catholics. Church attendance in Northern Ireland is estimated at 30 to 35 percent. The divisions between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland have largely evolved along religious lines. The policy of the Government remains one of promotion of religious tolerance.

Most Catholics and Protestants continue to live in segregated communities in Northern Ireland, including public housing ("housing estates") and other working class areas, although many middle class neighborhoods are mixed communities. Intimidation by paramilitary gangs often results in members of the minority community leaving housing estates, increasing the level of segregation.

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 and promote this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The law provides for the freedom to change one's religion or belief. The 1998 Human Rights Act guarantees freedom of religion and bans discrimination based on religion. Religious discrimination in employment and vocational training was made illegal by the 2003 Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations. The 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act covers "religiously aggravated offenses," based on existing assault, harassment, criminal damage, and public order offenses. Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" face higher maximum penalties where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime. According to the Crown Prosecution Service's annual report for 2003-04 (published in January), perpetrators of 44 religiously aggravated offenses were prosecuted under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act between April 2003 and the end of March 2004. In 22 of the offenses, the actual or perceived religion of the victim was Islam. The Crown Prosecution Service reported a 77 percent conviction rate on the 44 charges.

On July 7, 2004, the Government announced plans to reintroduce legislation making incitement to religious hatred a criminal offense. If enacted, the offense would complement existing legislation prohibiting incitement to racial hatred (which, courts have ruled, covers Sikhs and Jews, but not Muslims, Christians, or Hindus). Originally, the Government had tried to include such an offense in the 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act, but the provision was dropped over some peers' concerns about the law's potential implications. In the months after the proposal's reintroduction (as part of the Serious Organized Crime and Police Bill), some members of public and civil society spoke out against the measure. One opponent, comedian Rowan Atkinson, said it was a "fundamental freedom of society" to criticize others' religions. Partly because of this opposition, the offense was removed from the final version of the Serious Organized Crime and Police Bill, which Parliament then passed. On May 17, 2005, the Government announced it would once again introduce legislation containing the offense, this time as a stand-alone bill. Some religious organizations have allied with secularist bodies to oppose the bill, saying it would restrict freedom of speech. The Government maintains that the bill would apply only to extremist organizations that provoke hatred against religious faiths but not criminalize "criticism, commentary, or ridicule" of religions or their adherents. At the end of the period covered by this report, Parliament had not considered the new legislation.

There are two established (or state) churches, the Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). The Monarch is the “Supreme Governor” of the Church of England and always must be a member of the Church and promise to uphold it. The monarch’s connection with the Church of England is the subject of ongoing public debate. In 2003, a nongovernmental Commission on the Future of the Monarchy called for the Queen to be stripped of the title of Supreme Governor.

The monarch appoints Church of England officials on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Crown Appointments Commission, which includes lay and clergy representatives. The Church of Scotland appoints its own office bearers, and its affairs are not subject to any civil authority. The Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of Ireland are members of the Anglican Communion. There are no established churches in Wales or Northern Ireland. A February 2001 Home Office study suggested that the establishment status of the Church of England causes “religious disadvantage” to other religious communities. Those who believe that their freedom of religion has been infringed have the right to appeal to the courts for relief.

The Government has indicated it has no plans to move towards disestablishment of the Church of England unless both the Church and the public favor such a move; furthermore, the Government takes the view that establishment is deeply embedded in the nation’s history and in no way indicates a lack of respect for other faiths. Official events take an inclusive approach; for example, the national Remembrance Day Service, conducted under the auspices of the Church of England, also includes representatives of a broad range of faiths. The Government makes efforts to address specific needs of different faith communities, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s provision of a special Hajj delegation to provide consular and medical assistance to British Muslims on pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia.

Religious holy days that are considered national holidays include Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. No church or religious organization—established or otherwise—receives direct funding from the State. Religious bodies are expected to finance their own activities through endowment, investments, and fund-raising. The Government funds the repair of historic religious buildings, such as cathedrals and churches, but such funding is not restricted to Church of England buildings. A government grants program, financed largely through lottery money, helps to fund repair and maintenance of listed places of worship of all religions nationwide. The Government also contributes to the budget of the Church Conservation Trust, which preserves “redundant” Church of England buildings of architectural or historic significance. Several similar groups in England, Scotland, and Wales repair non-Anglican houses of worship.

Most religious institutions are classified as charities and, as such, enjoy a wide range of tax benefits. (The advancement of religion is considered to be a charitable purpose.) In England and Wales, the Charity Commission reviews the application of each body applying for registration as a charity. Commissioners base their decisions on a substantial body of case law. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Inland Revenue performs this task. Charities are exempt from taxes on most types of income and capital gains, provided that the charity uses the income or gains for charitable purposes. They also are exempt from the value-added tax.

The Government provides funding for a large number of so-called “faith schools.” As of January 2004, there were 6,903 state-funded schools with a religious character in England. All but 121 of these schools were Anglican, Catholic, or Methodist schools; there is also a well-established tradition of state support for Jewish schools. The Government has helped set up and fund a number of schools reflecting other religious traditions. These include four Muslim, two Sikh, one Greek Orthodox, and one Seventh-day Adventist school. In January 2005, Chief Inspector of Schools for England, David Bell, called on faith schools to be “intolerant of intolerance.” In February 2005, then-Schools Minister for England Stephen Twigg published a list of best practices of how faith schools can implement inclusiveness and collaboration.

In Scotland, most faith-based government-funded schools are Roman Catholic, although there is also a Jewish school. The Scottish Executive has funded an ongoing study into whether faith-based schools promote sectarianism or intolerance.

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support. In Northern Ireland, more than 90 percent of students attend schools that are either predominantly Catholic or Protestant. Integrated schools serve approximately 5 percent of school-age children whose families voluntarily choose this option, often after overcoming significant obstacles to provide the resources to start a new school and demonstrate its sustainability for 3 years before government funding begins. Demand for places in integrated schools outweighs the limited number of places available.

The law requires religious education in publicly maintained schools throughout the United Kingdom. According to the Education Reform Act of 1988, it forms part of the core curriculum for students in England and Wales. In Scotland, religious education of some sort is mandated by the Education Act of 1980. Throughout the United Kingdom, the shape and content of religious instruction is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed syllabi are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity while taking into account the teachings and practices of other principal religions in the country. Syllabi must be nondenominational and refrain from attempting to convert pupils.

In addition, schools in England and Wales have to provide a daily act of collective worship. In practice, this action mainly is Christian in character, reflecting Christianity's importance in the religious life of the country. This requirement may be waived if a school's administration deems it inappropriate for some or all of the students. All parents have the right to withdraw a child from religious education, but the schools must approve this request. Under some circumstances, non-Christian worship may instead be allowed. Teachers' organizations have criticized school prayer and called for a government review of the practice.

Where student bodies are characterized by a substantial percentage of religious minorities, schools may observe the religious festivals of other faiths. Schools also endeavor to accommodate religious requirements, such as providing halal meat for Muslim children.

In Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment Act bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. A broad network of laws, regulations, and oversight bodies work to ensure that there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious faiths. All public sector employers and all private firms with more than 10 employees must report annually to the Equality Commission on the religious composition of their workforces and must review their employment practices every 3 years. Noncompliance may result in criminal penalties and the loss of government contracts. Victims of employment discrimination may sue for damages. In addition, the 1998 Northern Ireland Act stipulates that all public authorities must show due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, including on the basis of religious belief. Each public authority must report its plans to promote equality to the Equality Commission, which is to review such plans every 5 years.

In 2003, Parliament approved the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations of 2003, which adopted a European Commission Directive against religious discrimination. The regulations prohibit employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a "genuine occupational requirement" of a religious nature. The Government attempts to raise awareness of protections under the new regulations through help lines and good-practice advice. The regulations, which specifically do not apply in Northern Ireland, came into force in later in 2003.

The Government makes an active effort to ensure that public servants are not discriminated against on the basis of religion and strives to accommodate religious practices by government employees whenever possible. For example, the Prison Service permits Muslim employees to take time off during their shifts to pray. It also provides prisoners with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim chaplains. The Advisory Group on Religion in Prisons monitors policy and practice on issues relating to religious provision. The military generally provides soldiers who are adherents of minority religions with chaplains of their faith.

The Home Office's Faith Communities Unit is responsible for promoting interfaith contact and ensuring that members of all faith communities enjoy the same life opportunities and government services. The Faith Communities Unit is also undertaking a project of "faith literacy" to improve government employees' understanding of different religious communities. In March 2004, the Home Office published a report, "Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities," in partnership with senior faith community representatives. The report specifically recommends measures to ensure that government consultations include relevant input from faith communities when forming policy, to assess the extent to which faith communities benefit from government funding programs, to address funding deficiencies, and to involve the different faith communities in national services and celebrations in a way that reflects the diversity of the country. The Faith Communities Unit is charged with following the report's recommendations, and a Home Office Steering Group was scheduled evaluate the effect of its recommendations in 2005.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

On March 2, 2005, the Court of Appeal ruled that Shabina Begum, a Muslim teenager, had been unlawfully excluded from her high school in Luton for wearing a jilbab, a traditional dress that leaves only the face and hands exposed. The school, which is 79 percent Muslim, had expelled Begum in 2002 for contravening its uniform policy, which had been drawn up after consultation with local Muslim organizations. The school's policy allowed girls to wear a skirt, pants, or a shalwar kameez, which comprises a loose tunic and pants, and to cover their heads with headscarves. After her expulsion, Begum filed suit in the High Court, which ruled in the school's favor. The Court of Appeal then overturned this decision. Some educators observed that the ruling opened a "legal minefield" for schools and called on the Government to provide more concrete guidance about their rights and obligations when it comes to uniform policies.

The 2003 Communications Act increased broadcasting opportunities for religious groups by lifting previous restrictions on religious bodies' ownership of broadcasting licenses. Under the new legislation, religious bodies can hold local and national digital radio and digital terrestrial television licenses. Prior to the law's enactment, religious bodies could hold cable, satellite, and local analog radio licenses. Because of the limited broadcast spectrum, religious groups are still prohibited from holding national analog radio licenses, national television analog licenses, and radio and television multiplex licenses.

According to a 1999 decision of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, a quasi-judicial, independent body established by law as the regulator and registrar for charities, the Church of Scientology does not come within the charity law definition of a religion. The Church of Scientology has not exercised its right of appeal to the court against the commission's decision. Scientology ministers are not considered ministers of religion for the purpose of UK immigration regulations. Scientologist chapels do not qualify as places of worship under the law. The Prison Service does not recognize Scientology as a religion for the purpose of facilitating prison visits by ministers, although prisoners who are adherents of Scientology are free to register their adherence and to manifest their beliefs consistent with good order and discipline in prisons. To meet the needs of individual prisoners, the Prison Service allows any prisoner registered as a Scientologist to have access to a representative of the Church of Scientology if he wishes to receive its ministry.

The Reverend Sun Myung Moon, leader of the Unification Church, has been excluded from the country since 2003 following a decision by the Home Secretary. Reverend Moon subsequently applied for entry clearance to enable him to visit. This was refused as a consequence of the exclusion, and Reverend Moon appealed this refusal on human rights grounds. An Immigration Adjudicator dismissed this appeal in April 2004.

In August 2004, new immigration regulations came into force, requiring visa applicants who wish to enter the country as ministers of religion to obtain level 4 competence in spoken English (on a scale of 1 to 9) on the International English Language Testing System. Visa adjudicators are permitted to waive the testing requirement at their discretion and where other evidence of English competency is provided, for applicants educated in an English-speaking country.

Other than some Anglican bishops' inclusion in the House of Lords, membership in a given religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents. The Anglican Archbishops of York and Canterbury; the Bishops of Durham, London, and Winchester; and 21 other bishops, in order of seniority, receive automatic membership in the House of Lords, whereas prominent clergy from other denominations or religions are not afforded this privilege. The Removal of Clergy Disqualification Act 2001 removed restrictions that prohibited all clergy ordained by an Anglican bishop, as well as ministers of the Church of Scotland, from seeking or holding membership in the House of Commons.

While not usually enforced and essentially a legal anachronism, blasphemy against Anglican doctrine remains technically illegal. Several religious organizations, in association with the Commission for Racial Equality, were attempting to abolish the law or broaden its protection to include all faiths. On January 13, 2005, Commission for Racial Equality Chairman Trevor Phillips told lawmakers that the Government's plan to enact legislation outlawing incitement to religious hatred should be paired with a repeal of the blasphemy law. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not reviewed the question, and the blasphemy law had not been abolished or revised.

Several Christian groups criticized the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) for its January 8 broadcast of Jerry Springer: The Opera, alleging that the show was blasphemous. The Office of Communications (Ofcom), the independent telecommunications regulator, received more than 16,000 complaints about the broadcast. On May 9, 2005, Ofcom's Content Board stated that while many people were "deeply

offended” by the broadcast, the program did not violate the regulator’s standards. On March 3, the Christian Institute filed papers with the High Court, asking for a judicial review of whether the BBC had failed to uphold decency standards or violated legal guarantees of freedom of religion. At the end of the period covered by this report, the court had not ruled on whether to grant permission for the legal review. In addition, Christian Voice announced it plans to bring a private blasphemy prosecution against unnamed individuals responsible for the program. During the period covered by this report, Christian Voice had not served summonses on the defendants in its case.

On December 20, 2004, a violent protest led Birmingham theater executives to cancel the rest of the performances of the play “Bezhti.” The play, whose name means “dishonor” in Punjabi, depicted rape and murder in a Sikh temple. Sikh community leaders requested that the play be rewritten so that the action does not take place within a temple, but the playwright, herself a Sikh, declined.

In relation to their percentage of the Northern Ireland population (44 percent), Catholics are underrepresented in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Government-mandated measures to increase Catholic representation in the PSNI have raised the proportion of Catholics in the police to 17 percent, compared to 12 percent in 1999.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in British society contributed to religious freedom. In Northern Ireland, where centuries-old sectarian divisions persisted between the Protestant and Catholic communities, political and cultural differences contributed to problems between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland.

The police in Northern Ireland reported 122 attacks against both Catholic and Protestant churches, schools, and meeting halls in 2004. Such sectarian violence often coincides with tensions during the spring and summer marching season. However, the 2004 marching season was largely peaceful, with only one incident of interfaith violence in North Belfast. Negotiations involving parade organizers, leaders in nationalist and loyalist areas, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government and police officials helped ensure public order.

From July 2004 through June 2005, the Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 482 anti-Semitic incidents in the United Kingdom. CST recorded 77 assaults and 43 instances of desecration and damage to property. The number of anti-Semitic incidents rose significantly during 2004. Figures from Israel’s Global Forum against Anti-Semitism stated that 310 anti-Semitic incidents occurred in the United Kingdom during the year, of which 77 were violent, as opposed to 163 anti-Semitic incidents in 2003, of which 55 were violent. The report stated that a “central cause” of the increase in incidents was “years of hostile reporting and commentary about Israel in the UK press.”

On August 22, 2004, cemetery officials discovered the desecration of approximately 60 gravestones in a Jewish cemetery in Birmingham. Police charged two suspects with racially aggravated criminal damage, racially aggravated public disorder, and causing racially aggravated harassment, alarm, or distress. On October 19, police charged Abu Hamza al-Masri with 16 criminal offenses, including soliciting or encouraging the murder of Jews, inciting racial hatred, and possessing a document that contained information “of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism.” At the end of the period covered by this report, his trial was pending.

The Muslim community was subject to intermittent incidents of Islamophobia, although no formal statistics were available. On January 15, 2005, an employment equality tribunal ruled in favor of a Muslim man whose employer dismissed him after he took 6 weeks off work to make a pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca. Prior to making his trip, the man had submitted a vacation request but received no response; a manager then told that him in the absence of a reply, he could assume his leave had been granted. Upon his return he was suspended without pay and then fired

for gross misconduct, with his employer stating that his leave had not been authorized. The tribunal ruled that by not trying to accommodate the employee's religious requirement to go on Hajj or justifying a refusal to authorize his leave, the company was placing Muslim employees at a particular disadvantage and discriminating on the grounds of religion.

The Islamic community has criticized an increase in the use of the police's "stop and search" powers and arrests of Muslims under anti-terrorism laws, with only a handful of searches actually leading to arrests or convictions. In an Islamic Human Rights Commission poll released in December 2004, 80 percent of British Muslims (compared with 45 percent in 2000 and 35 percent in 1999) stated they had been discriminated against because of their faith.

On December 14, 2004, police arrested the leader of the British National Party (BNP) on suspicion of incitement to racial hatred. His arrest was the twelfth following the July broadcast of a BBC documentary entitled "Secret Agent" in which BNP members were covertly recorded as they called Islam a "vicious, wicked faith." At the end of the period covered by this report, the leader's trial was pending.

The United Kingdom has both active interfaith and ecumenical movements. The Council of Christians and Jews works to advance better relations between the two religions and to combat anti-Semitism. The Interfaith Network links a wide range of religious and educational organizations with an interest in interfaith relations, including the national representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian communities. The Network has a consultative relationship with the Home Office, from which it receives financial support. The Inner Cities Religious Council encourages interfaith activity through regional conferences and support for local initiatives. The NGO Respect continues to operate to encourage voluntary time-sharing and mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

The main ecumenical body is the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, which serves as the main forum for interchurch cooperation and collaboration. Interchurch cooperation is not limited to dealings among denominations at the national level. For example, Anglican parishes may share their church with Roman Catholic congregations.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Embassy encouraged interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance. Embassy representatives attend regular meetings of the Three Faiths Forum, an interfaith dialog organization. In December 2004, the Embassy cosponsored with the Three Faiths Forum a visit by Iraqi religious leaders to learn from the United Kingdom's interfaith experience. On October 21, 2004, the Chargé d'Affaires hosted Iftar for Muslim leaders in the country at the end of Ramadan. Embassy officers were in regular contact with the Board of Jewish Deputies, the Chief Rabbi's Office, the Muslim College, and the Muslim Council of Britain.

In Edinburgh, consular officers met with the interfaith alliances of Glasgow and other cities and with Muslim leaders in several cities. They also spoke on religion and politics to the Jewish Literary Society and the Scottish American Studies Association. The Embassy sent a senior Scottish rabbi to the U.S. on an International Visitor program. Consulate officials were in regular contact with leaders of the Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, Roman Catholic Church, and the Jewish and Muslim communities.

In Northern Ireland, long-standing issues related to national identity have been part of political and economic friction between Protestant and Catholic communities. As an active supporter of the peace process, the U.S. Government has encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialogue between these two communities.

UZBEKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, in practice the Government continued to restrict this right. The Government permits the operation of what it considers mainstream religions, including approved Muslim groups, Jewish groups, the Russian Orthodox Church, and various other Christian denominations, such as Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Baptists, and generally registers newer religions. Christian church-

es generally are tolerated as long as they do not attempt to win converts among ethnic Uzbeks; however, the law prohibits or severely restricts activities such as proselytizing, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering private religious instruction.

There was a slight decline in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued its campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups suspected of extremist sentiments or activities. The Government arrested numerous alleged members of these groups and sentenced them to lengthy jail terms. Most of these were suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), a banned extremist Islamic political movement. The Government pressured the banned Islamic group Akromiylar (Akromiya), especially in Tashkent and Andijon, with those actions spilling over into violence and deaths in Andijon in May 2005. During the period covered by this report, the Government released 361 prisoners of conscience as part of a large-scale amnesty. The number arrested continued at higher levels than 2002–03; however, they remained far below the levels reported 1999–2001. The Government took into custody several hundred individuals following three terrorist bombings in Tashkent on July 30, 2004; the overwhelming majority of detainees were identified as having belonged to HT or other so-called “Wahhabi” groups. Most of these were released after questioning, but eventually approximately 115 were convicted on terrorism-related charges, and unknown numbers remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of a variety of Christian confessions, had difficulty satisfying the strict registration requirements set out by the law. As in previous years, Protestant groups with ethnic Uzbek members reported operating in a climate of harassment and fear. Even some registered groups experienced raids and harassment, including de-registration and closing of several groups. A small but growing number of “underground” mosques, such as those that were tolerated during the Soviet Union, operated under the close scrutiny of religious authorities and the security services. After the May 2005 violence in Andijon, the number of congregants at these mosques declined significantly.

The generally amicable relationship among religions contributed to religious freedom; however, ethnic Uzbek Christians continued to face harassment. This was particularly true for recent converts and for residents of smaller communities, who often faced pressure from neighbors, family, and employers. HT continued to circulate strongly anti-Semitic leaflets, the texts of which often originate from sources outside the country; however, these views are not seen as representative of the sentiments of the vast majority of the population.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy is actively engaged in monitoring religious freedom and maintains contact with government and religious leaders and human rights activists. The Embassy sponsored exchange and educational programs designed to promote religious tolerance and to expand religious freedom. The programs include the 3-year University of Washington partnership program for Cultural and Comparative Religious Studies, the program on Cultural and Religious Pluralism in Uzbekistan and the United States, and a Community Connection group on the topic of Islam in a Religiously Diverse United States.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 172,742 square miles and its population is estimated to be 26.9 million. Approximately 80 percent of the population is ethnic Uzbek, 5.5 percent Russian, 5 percent Tajik, 3 percent Kazakh, 2.5 percent Karakalpak, and 1.5 percent Tatar. There are no official statistics on membership in various faiths; however, it is estimated that 88 percent of the population is nominally Muslim. Approximately 9 percent of the population is Russian Orthodox; this percentage is steadily declining as the number of ethnic Russians and other Slavs remaining in the country decreases. A growing number of Muslims and Russian Orthodox adherents actively practice their religion. Outside of Tashkent, Muslim believers may now outnumber nonbelievers. Since 1991, when the country gained independence from the Soviet Union, there has been a resurgence, particularly in the Fergana Valley and the southern provinces, of the Hanafi School of Sunni Islam. During the decades of Soviet rule, most persons did not practice religion openly; however, it remained an important cultural factor in the lives of many, particularly Muslims.

The remaining 3 percent of the population includes small communities of Korean Christians, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhists, Baha’is, and Hare Krishnas. In addition, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 Ashkenazi and Bokharan Jews remain in the country, concentrated in the main cities of Tashkent, Bokhara,

and Samarkand. At least 80,000 others have emigrated since independence to Israel and the United States.

The law prohibits proselytizing, which constrains the activities of foreign missionaries, particularly those who seek to minister among the Muslims. In practice, many ignore the restriction. There is no significant immigrant community.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, in practice the Government restricted these rights. The Government is secular and there is no official state religion. Religious groups are prohibited from forming political parties and social movements.

Although the laws treat all religious confessions equally, the Government shows its support for the country's Muslim heritage by funding an Islamic university, 10 other Islamic educational institutions, and 2 Islamic centers. As in prior years, the Government provided logistical support for 4,000 selected Muslims who completed the Hajj, but the pilgrims paid their own expenses. The Government promotes an indigenous, moderate version of Islam through the control and financing of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (the Muftiate), which in turn controls the Islamic hierarchy, the content of imams' sermons, and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials. Kurbon Hayit and Roza Hayit are holy days that are also considered national holidays.

The 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations requires all religious groups and congregations to register and provides strict and burdensome criteria for their registration. Among its requirements, the law stipulates that each group must present a list of at least 100 citizen members to the local branches of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). This provision enables the Government to ban any group by finding technical grounds for denying its registration petition. This has had the effect of suppressing the activities of those Muslims seeking to worship outside the system of state-sponsored mosques.

After a post-independence increase in the number of mosques from 80 to 4,000 in the years from 1989–92, new registration requirements have decreased the number to around 2,000. New mosques, as well as those closed in the early 1990s, continued to face difficulties gaining registration.

To register, groups also must report in their charter a valid legal address. Local officials on occasion have denied approval of a legal address to prevent religious groups from registering. The MOJ also has cited this requirement in explaining local officials' decisions. The Jehovah's Witnesses Tashkent congregation had its registration application denied on these grounds. The Jehovah's Witnesses Fergana congregation encountered problems renting property when a new city administration cancelled its rental agreement. Some groups, such as the Tashkent International Church, have been reluctant to purchase property without assurance that their registration would be approved. Others claim that local officials arbitrarily withhold approval of the addresses because they oppose the existence of Christian churches with ethnic Uzbek members.

Some Christian groups applied for registration at local, regional, and national levels and were denied or never received an official answer during the period covered by this report, including the Greater Grace Christian Church in Samarkand, the Mir (Peace) Presbyterian Church in Nukus, the United Church of Evangelical Christians/Baptists in Tashkent, the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Andijon, the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Emmanuel, once the only registered Protestant church in Nukus, was deregistered by the MOJ in the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan and ordered to close on May 4. Some churches, particularly evangelical churches with ethnic Uzbek members, do not apply for registration because they do not think local officials will register them. Other groups, including those with too few members, have reported that they prefer not to bring themselves to the attention of authorities by submitting a registration application that obviously does not meet legal requirements. There are a few groups that refuse on principle to seek registration because they challenge the Government's right to require registration.

As of April 1, 2005, the Government had registered 2,154 religious congregations and organizations—a drop from 2,169 since December 2004, possibly reflecting deregistrations. The specific reason for the difference was not forthcoming from the Government. Muslim groups comprised 1,978 of the total registered, an increase of 13, while the number of registered Christian groups dropped by 12. The 176 registered minority religious groups include 60 Korean Christian, 31 Russian Orthodox, 22 Baptist, 20 Pentecostal ("Full Gospel"), 11 Seventh-day Adventist, 8 Jewish, 6

Baha'i, 4 Lutheran, 4 "New Apostolic," 4 Roman Catholic, 2 Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 Krishna Consciousness group, 1 Temple of Buddha, 1 Christian "Voice of God" Church, and 1 Armenian Apostolic.

A 2003 decree of the Cabinet of Ministers outlining new registration requirements for international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) has restricted the activities of faith-based entities. Several workers of these NGOs were asked to leave and were denied registration. Statements by government officials, as well as documents disseminated to the NGOs by the MOJ, indicated that the new requirements are intended, in part, to curtail the activities of international NGOs that proselytize as part of their charitable activities.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (1998 Religion Law) provides for freedom of worship, freedom from religious persecution, separation of church and state, and the right to establish schools and train clergy; however, the law also severely limits religious activity. It restricts religious rights that are judged to be in conflict with national security, prohibits proselytizing, bans religious subjects in public schools, prohibits the private teaching of religious principles, and requires religious groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials. Article 14 of the law prohibits the wearing of "cult robes" in public places by all except "those serving in religious organizations." This provision did not appear to have been enforced during the period covered by this report.

The Criminal Code formally distinguishes between "illegal" groups, which are those that are not registered properly, and "prohibited" groups, such as the Islamic political party HT, Tablighi Jamaat, and other groups branded with the general term "Wahhabi" that are banned altogether. The code makes it a criminal offense punishable by up to 5 years in prison to organize an illegal religious group or to resume the activities of such a group after it has been denied registration or ordered to disband. In addition, the code punishes participation in such a group with up to 3 years in prison. The code also provides penalties of up to 20 years in prison (if the crime results in "grave consequences") for "organizing or participating" in the activities of religious extremist, fundamentalist, separatist, or other prohibited groups. In practice, the courts ignore the distinction between illegal and prohibited groups and frequently convict members of unapproved Muslim groups under both statutes.

The Criminal and Civil Codes contain stiff penalties for violating the Religion Law and other statutes on religious activities. In addition to the prohibited activities that include organizing an illegal religious group, the law also proscribes persuading others to join such a group and drawing minors into a religious organization without the permission of their parents. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal.

The law prohibits groups that do not have a registered religious center from training religious personnel. There are seven centers that may legally train religious personnel. The law limits religious instruction to officially sanctioned religious schools and state-approved instructors. The law permits no private instruction and provides for fines for violations. Authorities closed an unlicensed Islamic kindergarten in Fergana Region on March 26, 2005, according to Uzbek newspaper Voice of Uzbekistan. There are 10 madrassas (including 2 for women), which provide secondary education. In addition, the Islamic Institute in Tashkent provides university-level instruction. The curriculum in these facilities is oriented towards those planning to become imams or religious teachers. The Cabinet of Ministers considers diplomas granted by madrassas equivalent to other diplomas, thus enabling graduates of those institutions to continue their education at the university level.

Shi'a Islamic education is restricted; the Government does not formally recognize the training of Shi'a imams outside the country, and no such education is available inside the country. There is no officially sanctioned religious instruction for those students who are simply interested in learning more about Islam. An increasing number of imams informally offer religious education; although this is technically illegal, local authorities are unlikely to take legal action. The Russian Orthodox Church operates two monasteries (one for women, one for men) and a seminary and offers Sunday school education through many of its churches. The Government "Jewish school" operates in Tashkent's Yakkasaroy District. Other faiths offer religious education through their religious centers.

The law prohibits the teaching of religious subjects in public schools, the private teaching of religious principles, and the teaching of religion to minors without parental consent. A course called "Comparative Religion" was taught at the Andijon Foreign Languages Institute during the year covered by this report.

In 2003, a panel of experts convened by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), reviewed the 1998 Religion Law and associated criminal and civil statutes and concluded that they were in violation of international norms. The OSCE sub-

mitted a number of recommendations, including lifting the bans on proselytizing and private religious instruction and decriminalizing activities of unregistered religious organizations. The Government, through its Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), agreed to consider the ODIHR recommendations but had taken no action to enact them by the end of the period covered by this report.

The main laws under which citizens are charged for religious activity are section 159 (anti-constitutional activity); section 244, paragraph 1 (inciting mass disorder); and section 244, paragraph 2 (production and distribution of materials which create a threat to public security and public order) of the Uzbekistan Criminal Code. Citizens charged under these sections are frequently charged with being members of the extremist Islamist political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), which promotes hate and praises acts of terrorism, although it maintains that it is committed to non-violence. The party's virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western literature and websites call for the overthrow of secular governments, including those in Central Asia, to be replaced with a world-wide Islamic government referred to as the Caliphate.

Because HT is primarily a political, not a religious, organization and because of its encouragement of terrorism, authorities' actions to restrict HT and prosecute its members are not a restriction on religious freedom per se (although the failure to observe due process and other norms constitute human rights violations). However, in thousands of cases authorities have asserted HT membership based solely on outward expressions of devout belief or have made false assertions of HT membership as a pretext for repressing the innocent expression of religious belief. Estimates from credible sources suggested that as many as 4,500 of the estimated 5,000 to 5,500 political prisoners being held in detention were members of the political movement HT. It is difficult to estimate precisely the number of persons arrested on charges of extremism and difficult to know how many of those were innocent but under suspicion because of their religious observance. The number of those arrested increased in comparison with last year; however, the number of individuals taken into custody remained well below the highs from 1999 to 2001. As in previous years, a large percentage of those taken into custody on charges of extremism were arrested arbitrarily.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were significant governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government, by continuing to deny registration to some religious groups and by de-registering some religious organizations, deprived them of their legal right to worship. The Government restricted many religious practices and activities and punished some citizens because they engaged in religious practices in violation of the registration laws. Ethnic Russians, Jews, and foreigners generally enjoy greater religious freedom than Muslim ethnic groups, particularly ethnic Uzbeks. Christian churches are for the most part tolerated as long as they do not attempt to win converts among ethnic Uzbeks. Ethnic Uzbek Christians are often secretive about their faith and sometimes do not attempt to register their organizations. Christian congregations of mixed ethnic background often face difficulties in registering or are reluctant to list their ethnic Uzbek members on registration lists for fear of incurring harassment by local officials.

The Government, for national security reasons, has conducted a repressive campaign against persons perceived as Islamic extremists. The result is an atmosphere of intimidation in which many young Muslim men say they do not feel safe even observing basic religious duties such as praying five times each day. Government workers, particularly teachers, generally feel less free to perform their religious responsibilities than do independent small traders.

While supportive of moderate Muslims, the Government is intolerant of Islamic groups it perceives to be extremist. A small but growing number of unofficial, independent mosques are allowed to operate quietly under the watch of official imams. Some sources have claimed that imams of registered mosques are required to submit lists of individuals in their congregations who may have extremist tendencies. There have also been reports that in some areas, mahalla (neighborhood) committees, and—in fewer instances—imams have come under pressure to provide names of persons who pray daily. Observers claim that this has led to a tendency on the part of some imams to submit names of unusually devout believers, who may have no extremist tendencies. There were credible reports that the heads of mahalla committees have told persons to say their daily prayers quietly at home to avoid being reported to the security services for unusual devotion. The Government controls the content of imams' sermons and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials.

The Government's harsh treatment of suspected religious extremists has generally suppressed outward expressions of religious piety. Following the May 2005 violence in Andijon, some journalists and human rights activists were arrested on charges that cited religious extremism. There were also credible reports of mahalla committee chairmen delivering special lectures to community gatherings in which they actively discouraged worshipping in mosques. Although many young men attend Friday prayers, hardly any are bearded. It is impossible to say to what extent this is a personal choice and reflects the largely secular society or to what extent it is because the Government considers wearing a beard to be a sign of extremism.

In the weeks immediately following the July 30, 2004, terrorist attacks, Muslim women reported feeling unease about wearing the hijab. There were credible reports of instances where students were prohibited from wearing headscarves at schools, leading many to speculate that the new regulation establishing school uniforms is being used as a pretext to require young girls to wear secular clothing. Following the bombings, there were reports from a credible source that some female students were suspended from Tashkent's Pedagogical University for wearing the hijab.

The Government does not consider repression of persons suspected of extremism to be a matter of religious freedom, but instead to be directed against those who want to foment armed resistance to the Government. However, authorities are highly suspicious of those who are more religiously observant than is the norm, including frequent mosque attendees, bearded men, and veiled women. Reports suggest that law enforcement and national security officers actively monitor and report on mosque activities and those of worshippers.

Some mosques continue to have difficulty registering. The Panjera mosque in Navoi has been trying unsuccessfully for 6 years to register, as have several mosques in the southern and eastern Fergana Valley. Approximately 500 persons meet for prayer at the mosque on feast days. In late 2003, several dozen residents of the Akhunbabayev District of Fergana demonstrated to protest local authorities' repeated refusal to register the locally funded Tuman mosque. A civil court in Fergana later ruled in favor of the mosque's registration, arguing that the district authorities had unlawfully impeded its application. The mosque has since opened and was registered over the end of 2003-beginning of 2004-time period.

Local authorities have continued to block the registration of evangelical Christian congregations, particularly those that attempt to minister to ethnic Uzbeks. On January 7, 2005, congregants of the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik reported that the Department of Justice in Tashkent Region denied their Church's registration application because of "grammatical errors in the Uzbek text of their charter." A Baptist congregation had its registration revoked without explanation in 2003, making the last successful Baptist registration in 1999. The Peace Church in Nukus, Karakalpakstan, which also was stripped of its registration in 2000, has been unable to reregister, as have the Hushhabbar ("Good News") Church in Guliston, the Pentecostal Resurrection Church in Andijon, and the Baptist Church in Gazalkent. Church leaders report that officials cite a multitude of reasons for refusing to register them, ranging from claims of falsified congregation lists to problems certifying addresses, "technicalities," and improper certification by fire inspectors, sanitation workers, and epidemiologists. The Mir (or Peace) Church of Nukus, the Hushhabbar Church in Guliston, the Pentecostal Church in Andijon and the Baptist Church in Gazalkent remain unregistered. All of these churches have ethnic Uzbek members.

Baptist churches associated with the International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians/Baptists, a denomination that rejects registration on principle, continued to come under pressure from local authorities. The International Church of Tashkent, a Protestant nondenominational church that ministers exclusively to Tashkent's international community, has been unable to obtain registration, despite several years of effort. The MOJ and the CRA have signaled a willingness to assist the International Church but note the law requires at least 100 congregants be citizens. The International Church meets regularly, without obstruction, but continues to experience difficulties renting a place of worship. As a result, the congregation met in a hotel, restaurant, and school during the year covered by this report.

The Jehovah's Witnesses continue to focus their registration efforts on obtaining registration in Tashkent. The Tashkent City authorities have refused to approve the address of the Jehovah's Witnesses' place of worship. Out of the 11 Jehovah's Witnesses' churches in the country, those in Chirchik and Fergana remained the only registered congregations. In Fergana, they continued to pursue a new legal address with a larger space, because they have encountered some difficulties holding larger meetings. Many in the Government remain suspicious of the Jehovah's Witnesses, viewing it as an extremist group. Internal police training documents have listed the Jehovah's Witnesses, along with the terrorist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and HT, as security threats. There were some signs that this attitude might

be softening in Tashkent, as illustrated by the Yakkasaroy District prosecutor's office and Tashkent City police's January 2005 decision not to pursue charges of proselytizing against Jehovah's Witness Dilshod Akhmedov. However, in general local officials and representatives of the religious establishment continued to express apprehension about the group's missionary activities.

The Government monitored a Presbyterian church in Tashkent Oblast, visiting approximately every 3 months to discuss church activities, reiterating that proselytizing is illegal, and scrutinizing the pictures and names of new church members. The Government requires the church to file monthly reports on its activities.

In December 2004, a Protestant medical student, Ilkas Aldungarov, was allegedly expelled from the Nukus branch of the Tashkent Pediatric Medical Institute due to his Christian faith, according to Forum 18 News Service. Other Protestant students were expelled in 2004 at Berdah Karakalpak State University. In September 2004, Forum 18 reported that two students were expelled from the medical institute in Nukus for their affiliation with the Church of Christ. In July 2004, Forum 18 also reported that three Hare Krishna devotees were expelled from Urgench State University.

During the period covered by this report, authorities did not permit two Russian Orthodox Church saints' relics to enter.

There were credible reports that the heads of mahalla committees have told converts that if they did not stop attending church, they would not be given a cemetery burial.

Evangelical pastors generally preach in Russian while offering limited services in the Uzbek language—the official national language and the one linked most closely to the majority Muslim population. The control over publication and distribution of religious literature has been used to restrict the distribution of the New Testament and scriptures in the Uzbek language; however, the CRA has made some concessions on publication and distribution of Uzbek-language materials. Some Biblically themed coloring books have been translated into Uzbek. The Government requires the Bible Society to file regular reports on its printing, importing, and translating activities. The government also places restrictions on the quantity of religious literature the Society can import, permitting shipments of up to 300 copies of religious materials three times per year.

The Government requires that the religious censor approve all religious literature; however, in practice a number of other government entities, including the customs service, police, and National Security Service, may suppress or confiscate religious literature of which they do not approve. The CRA, in accordance with the law, has given the right to publish, import, and distribute religious literature solely to registered central offices of religious organizations. Seven such offices have been registered to date: a nondenominational Bible society; two Islamic centers; and Russian Orthodox, Full Gospel, Baptist, and Roman Catholic offices. However, the Government discourages and occasionally has blocked registered central religious organizations from producing or importing Christian literature in the Uzbek language, even though Bibles in many other languages are available in Tashkent bookstores. Religious literature imported illegally is subject to confiscation and destruction.

The CRA sporadically issues an updated list of all officially endorsed Islamic literature. The list contains 510 titles. Books are no longer published with the phrase "permission for this book was granted by the CRA," but are now published with the phrase "this book is recommended by the CRA." Bookstores are not allowed to sell Islamic literature that does not appear on the list; however, in practice Islamic bookstores in Tashkent sell dozens of titles not included on the list, including works published by the state-owned Sharq Publishing House and a small number of works in Arabic imported from abroad. More controversial literature, when available, is not displayed on shelves. Possession of literature by authors deemed to be extremists may lead to arrest and prosecution. HT leaflets are prohibited categorically.

Baptists belonging to an unregistered congregation in Tashkent claimed that on March 6, 2005, police confiscated more than 1,000 religious booklets that had been approved by the CRA. Seven members were detained and questioned for 6 hours before being released. The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that a member was detained for several hours and religious literature confiscated while making a delivery to other members in Samarkand in August 2004. During the period covered by this report, Jehovah's Witnesses received two large shipments of Russian language Bibles, which were approved by the CRA. The Government reportedly destroyed Bibles belonging to members of a Baptist church in Tashkent. On February 14, 2004, according to press reports, police in Karakalpakstan confiscated religious literature from a Jehovah's Witness in Nukus. On January 4, 2004, the home of a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Jizzakh was searched and religious literature was confiscated, although charges were later dropped.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to commit numerous serious abuses of religious freedom. The Government's campaign against extremist Muslim groups, begun in the early 1990s, which followed an earlier Government effort to encourage a rebirth of Islam in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, resulted in numerous serious human rights abuses during the period covered by this report. The campaign was directed at three types of Muslims. The first included alleged Wahhabists, in particular those educated at madrassahs abroad and followers of Imam Abduvali Mirzaev of Andijon, who disappeared in 1995, and Imam Abidkhan Nazarov of Tashkent, who is widely believed to have fled abroad in 1998 to avoid arrest. The second group includes those suspected of being involved in the 1999 Tashkent bombings or of being involved with the IMU, whose roots are in Namangan and is designated by the U.S. Government as an international terrorist organization. The third, and largest, group includes suspected members of the extremist Islamic political party HT. The campaign resulted in the arrest of many observant Muslims who were not extremists. The campaign also resulted in allegations that hundreds, perhaps thousands, have been physically mistreated or tortured; dozens of these claims have been confirmed. Persons accused of involvement with the organization, which often involves nothing more than having attended one of its meetings or passing along banned HT leaflets, continued to be subject to prison sentences of up to 15 years.

The Government is also resolute to prevent the growth of other extremist Islamic organizations and of extremist forms of Islam that it broadly labels under the rubric of Wahhabism. The authorities appear to suspect that Muslims who meet privately to pray or study Islam are extremists. People accused of "Wahhabism" faced abuse ranging from job loss to physical abuse and long imprisonment.

The Government branded an Islamic missionary group, Tabligh Jamaat ("Outreach Society"), an "extremist" organization. The group's worship, dress, and grooming practices are in accordance with their interpretation of how things were during the Prophet Muhammed's time. According to various religious experts, there is no indication that Tabligh seeks to overthrow the regime; members claimed to be exclusively religious and apolitical.

Between July and December 2004, Tabligh members were placed on trial three separate times in the Fergana Valley. On October 18, 2004, in Andijon, 11 persons were sentenced to 5-year prison terms. Two other followers of Tabligh tried in November 2004 were only sentenced to 6 months, 4 of which were credited as time served. The Tashkent trial of eight members of Tabligh concluded when seven of the eight defendants were amnestied on January 7, 2005, a very unusual action. One defendant, Jamoliddin Aminov, was not released. Radio Liberty reported in March 2005 about a trial of six more Tabligh members, four of whom were amnestied and two of whom were fined.

The Islamic group Akromiylar (Akromiya) has been denied registration by the Government since 1997. According to religious experts, Akromiylar is a religious movement that promotes business, not extremism. Courts in Andijon, Tashkent, and Surkhandarya charged members of these groups with extremism and anti-constitutional activity. On March 29, 2005, a court in the Syrdarya region sentenced seven successful food vendors from the town of Bakht to prison sentences of 8 to 9 years on charges of anti-constitutional activity, religious extremism, and tax evasion, based on their alleged membership in Akromiylar. Family members of the defendants claimed that the men were not members of Akromiylar, and that the court's decision was based entirely on confessions that the defendants had been forced to sign. The decision was upheld by an appellate court on May 3, 2005, and by the Supreme Court on May 21, 2005.

Intermittent peaceful demonstrations, conducted since February 2005 outside of Andijon's Oltinkul District Court in support of 23 alleged Akromiylar members, provoked civil unrest there in May and June 2005. In early February 2005, in Andijon, a case was opened against these 23 men of the Islamic group Akromiylar on charges of anti-constitutional activity, possession of banned religious materials, and extremism. In March 2005, Radio Liberty reported an investigation of an additional 17 persons on similar charges. Protestors subsequently staged public demonstrations in Andijon for 2 to 3 months, demanding justice and the release of the accused. On the evening of May 12, 2005, an unknown number of individuals, possibly supporters of the men facing trial, attacked a police garrison, seized weapons, and broke into a nearby prison and released several hundred inmates. On the evening of May 13, according to the testimony of several witnesses, military vehicles drove into Bobur Square, where up to 3,000 persons had gathered, and fired indiscriminately into the crowd without warning on more than one instance. There were credible reports of many more civilians killed while fleeing the scene of the protests. The total number of dead as a result of the violence was variously estimated at between

170 and more than 700. In public statements about the events, the Government referred to all on trial and in prison, as well as all those killed on May 13, as “religious extremists.”

Following the terrorist attacks of March–April and July 2004, the Government took into custody at least 500 persons, the overwhelming majority of whom were identified as having belonged to HT or various Wahhabi groups. The arrests were made for national security reasons, but in conducting its operations, the police and security services reportedly relied on a list of approximately 1,000 individuals who had been convicted of extremism and subsequently amnestied. The Government also took into custody relatives of persons currently in jail on charges of extremism. The majority of those taken into custody were released after questioning. Approximately 115 persons were convicted on terrorism-related charges during the period covered by this report. There were some credible allegations of torture. Trials of the first terrorist suspects began in August 2004. As of the end of this reporting period, all 85 of those charged in connection with the terrorist acts of March and April 2004 had been convicted. While some were sentenced to probation, most were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 3 to 18 years.

Persons arrested on suspicion of extremism often face particularly severe mistreatment in custody, including torture, beatings, and particularly harsh prison conditions, and were typically sentenced to between 7 and 12 years in jail. Prison authorities reportedly did not allow many prisoners suspected of Islamic extremism to practice their religion freely and, in some circumstances, did not allow them to own a Qur’an. Prison routines often did not permit inmates to pray five times a day, and work and eating schedules were often not adjusted to account for the Ramadan fast. Authorities reportedly punished inmates who attempted to fulfill their religious obligations against prison rules, or who protested the rules themselves, with solitary confinement and beatings. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of individuals already in prison in connection with extremist activities prior to Andijon dying as a result of beatings or torture. In March 2004, Abdurrahman Narzullaev, a convicted religious extremist serving a 16-year sentence in Karshi prison, died of a pulmonary infection after prison authorities allegedly attempted to break his hunger strike by force-feeding him. Although specific information is difficult to obtain, human rights and other observers maintain that prisoners frequently die of diseases directly related to the conditions of their confinement. There were no developments in the investigation of the deaths of Mirzakomil Avazov and Khusnuddin Olimov (August 2002), convicted HT members who were boiled to death after being caught praying in Jasyk prison.

On September 24, 2004, the Supreme Court issued a decree definitively banning the use of evidence obtained by torture or other illegal means. The Government has since taken limited administrative steps to eliminate torture in detention. In October 2004, international observers monitored the trial of 23 alleged extremists in which witnesses and defendants stated that their testimonies had been elicited through torture. The presiding judge did not investigate the allegations of torture. All 23, including one woman, were convicted; no one received the death penalty.

Also in October 2004, Forum 18 reported that the imam of a Navoi mosque and 16 members were given sentences from 12 to 16 years on criminal charges, although the defendants admit only to being adherents of Islam. Another Forum 18 report states that in February 2005, two followers of Sufi Islam were given 6-year sentences; the defendants claimed that HT leaflets were planted on them during their arrest and that they were tortured.

Unlike in fall 2003, there were no reported demonstrations during the month of Ramadan in 2004. There were numerous credible reports that authorities in several prisons mistreated prisoners in connection with the 2003 demonstrations. According to relatives of prisoners and local human rights activists, well over 100 inmates jailed on charges of extremism staged hunger strikes and other protests in 2003 to demand that prison authorities adjust labor and eating schedules to accommodate the Ramadan fast. The protests took place in the Jasyk prison in Karakalpakstan, as well as in Karshi, Zarafshan, and Navoi. In response, several prisoners were reportedly beaten in Jasyk, while in Karshi more than 100 prisoners were placed in special punishment cells, and many reportedly were beaten. Relatives of prisoners in Navoi reported that inmates who participated in the protest actions were subject to additional reprisals in early March and April 2004. Among those participating in these prison demonstrations was Abdurrahman Narzullaev, whose death is mentioned above.

In May 2004, Husnuddin Nazarov reportedly disappeared on the way to evening prayer services. His family alleged that members of the security services detained Nazarov. Husnuddin Nazarov is the eldest son of Imam Abidkhan Nazarov, an influential religious figure in Tashkent who was dismissed from his position at the

Tokhtabay mosque in 1995; he also disappeared without reported notice to his family. Imam Nazarov's followers were principal targets of the Government's effort to end extremism. His mother was reported to have appealed to human rights activists for help on this case in March 2005.

Family members of persons wanted in connection with Islamic political activities, or already jailed in connection with those activities, often are harassed or arrested. In some cases, the relatives themselves are involved in what the Government considers illegal religious activities, such as attending meetings or being members of illegal religious groups, but in many cases the relatives' guilt is only by association.

Human rights activists have reported numerous cases of persons convicted of extremism who have been punished harshly for refusing to accept the moderate interpretations of Islam presented by imams visiting their prisons. There were also credible reports that prisoners who refused to sign letters renouncing what the authorities deemed religious extremism were beaten or put in isolation cells. On April 11, 2005, nine persons were convicted of religious extremism and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 6 to 13 years, amid allegations they had been tortured to confess.

In November 2004, Fergana Region resident Abduvohid Abduvahobov was sentenced to 7 years in a minimum-security prison, according to the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Activists of Uzbekistan. He was accused of Wahhabism and found guilty of anti-constitutional activities, possession of banned religious materials, and religious extremism. On August 8, 2003, the Chirchik City Court added 3 years to the sentence of Tolib Khaidarov for violating prison rules. Khaidarov complained that many of the alleged prison violations used to extend his sentence were false and that a prison administrator attempted to force him to write a confession letter. Khaidarov was originally imprisoned for anticonstitutional activities and belonging to an illegal religious organization.

Forum 18 reported that in July 2004, the National Security Service raided the home of Normurod Zhumaev, who was arrested for leading a group of Muslims who studied the Qur'an at his home. On January 20, 2005, in Tashkent City Court, eight Muslims were accused of using and distributing banned Islamic audio recordings.

Women continued to be detained for participating in or organizing demonstrations demanding the release of male relatives jailed on suspicion of Islamic extremism; however, unlike in past years, no women were convicted for such activities. Most of those detained were simply driven home or released after a short period of time with an administrative fine. There were reports that police insulted or forced some of these women to remove their head coverings. Although the police generally did not arrest women simply for taking part in this type of demonstration, many Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) offices maintained a list of women who participated in protests and detained many for questioning in the aftermath of the March, April, and July 2004 bombings. According to the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Activists of Uzbekistan, four women who had been charged with anti-constitutional activity, possession of banned religious materials, and religious extremism were amnestied in December 2004.

As in previous years, there were reports that police planted narcotics, ammunition, and religious leaflets on citizens to justify their arrests. According to human rights activists, the police arrested many of those whose religious observance, sometimes indicated by their dress or beards, made them suspect to the security services.

As in last year, there was a report that evangelical Christians were beaten. In recent months, the religious press has carried stories that some of these groups have been threatened. On April 3, 2005, according to a posting by the Internet reporting service Forum 18, police and NSS officers failed to respond to Christian convert Khaldibek Primbetov's complaint that villagers in Yanboshkala outside of Nukus had beaten him and told him to "return to Islam" or leave the village. In June 2004, an NSS officer in Khorezm questioned two members of an unregistered Baptist church. Forum 18 reported that one of the men was hit during questioning, although local authorities strenuously denied the allegations.

On the other hand, there were more allegations during the year, especially during the last quarter of the reporting period, that Christian evangelicals were detained. Even if they are not taken into custody, pastors who conduct unauthorized religious services still run the risk of arrest, which can have an effect on their activities. For example, Bakhtier Tuichiev, the pastor of a Full Gospel Pentecostal church in Andijon continued to face harassment from local officials.

Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. Police occasionally broke up meetings of unregistered evangelical congregations and detained their members. In October 2004, a district court in Tashkent fined a Baptist pastor \$65 (65,000 soum). Twenty of the 125 members of the unregistered Baptist church in the Surkhandarya Region were detained and questioned in May

2005, although none was charged with a crime. During the year covered by the report, six parishioners of Vifaniya (“Bethany”) Baptist congregation in Tashkent were detained and received administrative punishment for meeting as an unregistered organization. Credible reports alleged that in June 2005, two Baptist pastors and four church members were arrested after plainclothes police officers raided their church in Tashkent. On April 7, 2005, Baptist Farkhod Khamedov was sentenced to 10 days of administrative punishment; the appellate court was to decide whether his Bible should be destroyed as punishment for conducting a religious meeting in Tashkent, according to Forum 18 News Service. These arrests followed similar events in 2003, when Baptists in Khalkabad were imprisoned and fined for worshipping privately, and a Baptist pastor in Urgench was fined administratively for allegedly conducting religious work among children without their parents’ permission.

Raids on other Christian denominations continued as well. On March 9, 2005, police raided an unauthorized Protestant meeting involving citizens and South Korean missionaries outside Tashkent; the citizens were fined. In a separate incident on March 10, 2004, a criminal court fined six members of a Protestant church in Tashkent for holding unauthorized religious meetings in a private home. In September 2004, authorities disrupted a prayer meeting of the Greater Grace Church in Samarkand and forced members to sign confessions. Officers confiscated Bibles and papers, including officially approved literature. The Bibles were returned in November 2004. When the pastor traveled abroad, he was warned by the Government not to return, and he and his family were threatened. In October 2004, police disrupted the church services of an unregistered Christian denomination in Tashkent. Although none of the parishioners was arrested, several dozen were questioned at the church. In August 2003, police in Nukus raided the Peace Protestant Church, reportedly for the fourth time, and fined two of the Church’s leaders for holding illegal religious services. According to Forum 18, in September 2003, police in Chirchik disrupted the Sunday services of the unregistered Friendship Protestant Church.

During the period covered by this report, police also entered the homes of relatives of Pentecostal Pastor Bakhrom Nazarov without properly identifying themselves. Christian literature was confiscated and destroyed. On October 19, 2004, the Sherabad District Criminal Court in the Surkhandarya Region found Nazarov guilty of proselytizing and fined him \$312 (326,500 soum). On July 14, 2004, the criminal court in Termez sentenced Nazarov to 10 days in prison and fined 10 ethnic Uzbek congregants \$5 to \$31 (5,440 to 32,680 soum). According to recent reports after the violence at Andijon, the pastor of a registered church was detained, taken to court and fined under Article 240 of the Administrative code, “violation of religious legislation—proselytizing.”

Although the authorities tolerate the existence of many Christian evangelical groups, they enforce the law’s ban on proselytizing. The Government often monitors and harasses those who openly try to convert Muslims to Christianity. Jehovah’s Witnesses have come under particular scrutiny. In September 2004, Jehovah’s Witnesses member Dilshod Akhmedov was charged with proselytizing. He was detained on January 28, 2005, but was released the same day. Yakkasaroy District prosecutor’s office and Tashkent City police decided not to pursue the charge against him. In December 2003, two members of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Karshi were arrested while preaching door-to-door. In July 2004, one member was detained for distributing religious literature, but the court in Takhiatash quickly closed the case.

Throughout the period covered by this report, members of Jehovah’s Witnesses were arrested and fined for illegally teaching religion and proselytizing. In July 2004, police questioned six Jehovah’s Witnesses members in Kogon, and ordered one to pay an administrative fine of \$10 (10,900 soum) for providing unauthorized religious instruction. In August 2004, a member of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Kogon was levied an administrative fine of \$13 (14,170 soum) for allegedly conducting illegal religious teaching. On January 26, 2005, authorities raided an unauthorized religious meeting in Karshi and questioned 42 members. Two members, Alisher Ruziev and Valeriy Khrekov, were sentenced to 10 days in prison, while seven were fined in relation to the gathering. On March 24, 2005, more than 200 members were detained during various raids in Tashkent, 38 in Kogon, 28 in Bokhara, 25 in Samarkand, 24 in Navoi, and 10 in Bikobod. One hundred twenty persons were questioned in Angren. Police also reportedly confiscated religious materials. Most detainees were released in the early morning on March 25, 2005. In Tashkent, the two who remained in custody were released 24 hours after the arrest. Authorities brought 26 administrative cases against Jehovah’s Witnesses in relation to the March 24, 2005, raids. On March 29, 2005, at Tashkent’s Akmal Ikramov District Court, one member was fined \$6 (6,500 soum) and another was ordered to pay \$4.50 (5,000 soum) resulting from the nationwide March 24 operation. An additional three Jehovah’s Witnesses members, who were also picked up in the March 24 sweep,

each received an official warning. These events were similar to those the Jehovah's Witnesses experienced in the city of Zhuma and Tashkent reported in 2003 and again in 2004. On June 23, 2005, the Karshi city procurator's office brought criminal cases against three Karshi-based Jehovah's Witnesses members, charging them with proselytizing, meeting as an unregistered group and distributing banned religious materials.

In February 2004, Vladimir Kushchevoy, a Jehovah's Witness resident in Samarkand, was sentenced to 3 years of corrective labor, later reduced to 1-year probation, for providing unauthorized religious instruction. In June 2004 in Uchkuduk, Jehovah's Witness member Tolkin Hankildiev was detained for approximately 12 hours and fined \$26 (27,200 soum).

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In the first half of 2003, after years of banning his writings, the Government allowed former Mufti Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf to publish 3 volumes of a projected 30-volume compendium of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (hadith). During the year covered by this report, the former Mufti published an additional 6 volumes. He created a popular Islamic website, which is not blocked by the Government. He also published books against religious extremism, as well as on Sufism and Islamic theology. The Government allowed him to publish minor monthly works. The former Mufti, a revered figure in the country, has also been permitted to continue hosting a popular radio program on Islam and to teach at the Islamic University. Muhammad Yusuf broke from the Government in 1993, insisting that its attempts to control the content of Islam were counterproductive and only fed extremism. He continued to argue that greater opportunities for religious education are the only hope for ensuring that the people have a proper understanding of Islam.

Authorities have allowed a small but growing number of unregistered mosques to reopen, both in cities and in the countryside. In addition, unofficial imams began working, particularly in rural areas, under the close watch of religious officials. Some of these provide informal religious instruction, which, while technically illegal, is increasingly tolerated in some areas. Following the 1999 Tashkent bombings, most unregistered mosques were shut down. These mosques, many of which had been functioning underground throughout the Soviet period, served the spiritual needs of the people in ways that the large, registered mosques were often unable to do. The unregistered mosques first began to reopen in late 2001 and early 2002.

The national television channel aired three religious programs—the Islamic University-produced “Enlightenment,” the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan-produced “Palace of Life,” and “Religion and Social Progress.” Each provided a better understanding of moderate Islam, the education of young people, and guidance on how to live. Formal Islamic education in schools was not mentioned in these programs. The CRA hailed the programs as revolutionary for Uzbekistan, explaining that previously only mosques provided information on Islam.

The CRA announced and released its new Qur'an in Braille and ordered 8,000 copies of the first edition.

Since 2002, Uzbeks have not been required to pass an exam before being allowed to go on the Hajj. Previously, a quasi-governmental board selected pilgrims in a testing process widely viewed as corrupt. However, the Government still exercises considerable logistical control over Uzbek pilgrims. The standardized cost for citizens who go on the pilgrimage, \$ 2,200 USD (2,398,000 soum), is quite substantial. Approximately 1,500 of the 4,200 Uzbek pilgrims who made the Hajj in 2005 were women, an increase over years past.

The Government continued to respect the military pacifism of Jehovah's Witnesses. The draft board routinely gave exemptions.

On April 30, 2005, an official at the MVD confirmed reports that a Chilonzor District inspector was disciplined in connection with a case involving actions taken against Baptist members Flyura Valitova and Farkhod Khamedov. The District station also reportedly planned to conduct “reeducation” courses for its officers.

In March 2005, the Government completed an amnesty of 361 prisoners of conscience in the 2004–05 amnesty, the vast majority of whom had been convicted of

Islamic extremism. This followed an amnesty in 2003–04 of 704, as well as the 2002–03 amnesty of 923 such prisoners.

Imams of registered mosques continue to visit prisons, where they have met with prisoners convicted of extremism. While the effect of these visits has been undermined by the actions of prison authorities (prisoners who argue with the imams have reportedly been subject to severe mistreatment), the visits themselves are a welcome development. Imams have also met with amnestied prisoners convicted of extremism upon their return to their communities. Previously, no known attempts were made to persuade suspected extremists with religious instruction.

While some women reported feeling unease about wearing conservative Muslim attire following the March–April and July 30, 2004 terrorist attacks, overall there continued to be increased tolerance for the use of head coverings by Muslim women. During the period covered by this report, the hijab was seen more frequently in Tashkent and the more religiously conservative parts of the Fergana Valley and the southern provinces of Kashkadaria and Surkhondaria. In October 2004, authorities in Karshi encouraged Nigora Jahilova to stop wearing the hijab in public, according to a Forum 18 News Service report. The CRA has taken the position that women should not be barred from educational institutions on the basis of their religious dress and has actively assisted some women who had been previously expelled to gain readmission to their universities. During the period covered by this report, it was more common to see women wearing the hijab and, less frequently, the veil on the street.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

There was no pattern of discrimination against Jewish persons. Synagogues function openly; Hebrew education, Jewish cultural events, and the publication of a community newspaper take place undisturbed. Many Jews have emigrated to the United States and Israel, but this is most likely because of bleak economic prospects and because of their connection to families abroad, rather than anti-Jewish sentiment. Anti-Semitic leaflets of unknown origin arrived in the mail after the July 2004 bombings at the U.S. and Israeli Embassies; however, these views were not representative of the feelings of the vast majority of the population. One of the clearest examples of the Jewish community's continued standing in society is the government school in Tashkent's Yakkasaroy District, officially known as the "Jewish school." There are Jewish kindergartens in Tashkent and Samarkand, which officially teach Jewish "culture."

Christians were generally well tolerated, provided they did not actively proselytize. There were reports of discrimination against Muslims who converted to Christianity. Difficulties that evangelical Christian churches and churches with ethnic Uzbeks face often reflect societal attitudes.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy actively engages in monitoring religious freedom issues and maintains contact with government and religious leaders and human rights advocates. Members of Congress and other high-level legislative and executive branch officials met with Uzbek officials abroad and in the country during the period covered by this report and expressed strong concerns regarding human rights, including the U.S. stance on freedom of religious expression.

The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials met with local religious leaders, human rights activists, and country officials to discuss specific issues of human rights and religious freedom. Officials in Washington met on several occasions with Embassy officials of the country to convey U.S. concerns regarding religious freedom. U.S. officials traveled around the country meeting with religious leaders and groups as well as with government officials. Embassy officials maintain regular contact with the CRA, as well as with religious leaders and human rights activists. On October 25, 2004, during Ramadan the Ambassador hosted the third annual Iftar, providing an intimate forum for frank discussion with government and religious leaders.

When the Embassy received information concerning difficulties faced by religious groups, it intervened on their behalf just as in the past. This included observant Muslims, Baptists, Grace Church in Samarkand, the Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country, and several faith-based foreign aid organizations. All but 2 of the approximately 50 Jehovah's Witnesses detained in Tashkent's Chilonzor District on

March 24, 2005, were released within hours, a fact they credited to the Embassy presence.

Embassy officials met with numerous Muslim clergymen. In October 2004, nine alumni of the Community Connections program "Islam in a Religiously Diverse United States" met with Embassy officials in Urgench to talk about their visit to the United States. On April 20, 2005, Embassy officials met with Cultural and Religious Pluralism alumni at Kok Gumbaz mosque in Qarshi. Religious leaders shared impressions of their visit to the United States. Embassy officials pressed the Government to take action against security force members implicated in the torture of individuals arrested on suspicion of Islamic extremism. Embassy officials repeatedly urged the Government to allow more freedom of religious expression and to allow more mosques to be registered. U.S. officials, both in Washington and in Tashkent, have encouraged the Government to revise its laws on religion, including repealing the ban on proselytizing, lifting restrictions on the import and publication of religious literature, and eliminating legal provisions prohibiting the private teaching of religion, which the U.S. Government believes is an essential element for preventing further radicalization of young Muslims.

The U.S. sponsors exchange and educational programs that are specifically designed to promote religious tolerance and to expand religious freedom. In September 2004, the "Religion in a Secular Society" International Visitors Program sent the deputy mufti and head imams from Samarqand and Surkhondarya to the United States to view for themselves the role that religious organizations play in American society and the separation of religion and state. The Community Connections and Cultural and Religious Pluralism projects, programs conducted in cooperation with the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), brought 70 local Islamic leaders to the U.S. during the reporting year, exposing them to the diversity of religious practice in the United States. A 3-year Comparative Religious Studies Program, funded by the Embassy and managed by the University of Washington, provides for exchange of experts and professors from five local universities. One of the major goals of the project is the development of school curricula that foster religious tolerance. In all of these programs, the central premise is that religious tolerance and political security do not conflict, but rather are complementary goals.

NEAR EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

ALGERIA

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and prohibits discrimination by providing various individual liberties. Although the Constitution does not specifically prohibit discrimination based on religious belief, the Government generally respected religious freedom in practice; however, there were some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Islam is the only state-sanctioned religion, and the law limits the practice of other faiths, including prohibiting public assembly for purposes of practicing a faith other than Islam. However, the Government follows a de facto policy of tolerance by allowing registered, non-Muslim faiths, in limited instances, to conduct public religious services. The Government continued to require religious organizations to register; non-Islamic proselytizing is a deportable offense for foreigners, and the importation of religious texts still faces lengthy delays for government approval.

Self-proclaimed Muslim terrorists continued to justify their killing of security force members and civilians by referring to interpretations of religious texts; however, the level of violence perpetrated by terrorists continued to decline during the reporting year.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, differences remain within the country's Muslim majority about the interpretation and practice of Islam.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 6,406,880 square miles, and its population is approximately 33 million. More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. There is a small community of Ibadi Muslims in Ghardaia. Official data on the number of non-Muslim residents is not available; however, practitioners report it to be below 5,000. Many citizens who practice non-Muslim faiths fled the country due to violent acts of terrorism committed by Islamic extremists throughout the 1990s; as a result, the number of Christians and Jews in the country is significantly lower than the estimated total before 1992. According to Christian community leaders, Methodists and members of other Protestant denominations account for the largest numbers of non-Muslims, followed by Roman Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists. It is estimated that there are approximately 3,000 members of the Evangelical Church (mostly in the Kabylie region) and approximately 300 Catholics. A large number of the country's Christians are illegal immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa en route to Europe, making it difficult to estimate accurately their numbers.

For security reasons, due mainly to the civil conflict, Christians concentrated in the large cities of Algiers, Annaba, and Oran in the mid-1990s. Recently, evangelical proselytizing has increased the size of the Christian community in the eastern, Berber region of Kabylie. The number of "house churches," where members meet secretly in the homes of fellow members for fear of exposure or because they cannot finance the construction of a church, has reportedly increased in the region.

Only one missionary group operates in the country on a full-time basis. Other evangelical groups travel to and from the country, but they are not established. While Christians do not proselytize actively, they report that conversions take place without government sanction or interference.

There is no active Jewish community left, although a small number of Jews continue to live in Algiers. The Algiers synagogue has been closed since the mid-1990s due to fears of terrorist attack. The President of the Algerian Jewish community lives in France, but he was invited by President Bouteflika to participate in Alge-

rian Revolution Day festivities in November. A number of Jews of Algerian origin living abroad have visited the country in the past 2 years, including a group that visited Oran in 2004 and that was well received by local authorities. French Jews of Algerian origin have been actively involved in ongoing French-Algerian official discussions on how to maintain French cemeteries in the country, an issue of some sensitivity in both countries.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion and prohibits discrimination by providing various individual liberties. Although the Constitution does not specifically prohibit discrimination based on religious belief, the Government generally respects religious freedom in practice; however, there were some restrictions. There are no specific laws in place to protect against the violation of freedom of religion; however, other statutes protecting individual civil liberties may provide such protection. The law limits the practice of non-Islamic faiths by requiring organized religions to register with the Government and controlling the importation of religious materials; however, the Government follows a de facto policy of tolerance by allowing, in limited instances, the conduct of religious services by non-Muslim faiths, which were open to the public. While there are no laws against proselytizing by citizens, proselytizing is a deportable offense for noncitizens.

The Government recognizes the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Awal Moharem, Ashura, and Mawlid Nabbaoui as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government requires organized religions to submit and obtain official recognition prior to conducting any religious activities. The Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Seventh-day Adventist churches are the only non-Islamic faiths authorized to operate in the country. Members of other churches are forced to operate without government permission and secretly practice their faith in their homes, or like Methodists and Presbyterians, register as a part of the Protestant Church of Algeria. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for determining the punishment against a nonrecognized association. The Government follows a de facto policy of tolerance by not interfering in the internal affairs of non-Islamic faiths, whether they are one of the officially recognized churches or a "house church." Although the Minister of Religious Affairs has publicly welcomed Christians to practice their faith in Algeria, he has also stated that the Government cannot tolerate churches that behave like sects. He has particularly criticized the Evangelical Church as distorting the image of Islam and called the church "dangerous."

In 2005, the Government decided to take full control of curriculum for students at Islamic institutions which develop religious cadres. The Government also appoints imams to mosques and by law is allowed to provide general guidance and to pre-screen and approve sermons before they are delivered publicly. In practice, the Government generally reviews sermons after the fact. The Government's right of review has not been exercised with non-Islamic faiths. The Government also monitors activities in mosques for possible security-related offenses, bars the use of mosques as public meeting places outside of regular prayer hours, and convokes imams to the Ministry of Religious Affairs for "disciplinary action" when warranted.

In February 2004, the imam of the Emir Abdelkader Mosque in Constantine attacked the independent press during the Friday sermon broadcast on state television and radio. The imam stated that cartoons by Ali Dilem of the French-language daily *La Liberté* undermined the sanctities of Islam, called him a collaborator with the enemies of Islam, and urged Muslims to boycott the newspaper. Similar content was heard during the sermons in Batna, Khenchela, Guelma, and Algiers. Because the Government can pre-screen the content of sermons, most observers viewed the verbal attack as an election year ploy sanctioned by the Government to discredit the independent press and as an inappropriate use of the mosque to further political objectives. Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia called the sermon "a regrettable event."

Amendments to the Penal Code in 2001 established strict punishments, including fines and prison sentences, for anyone other than a government-designated imam who preaches in a mosque. Harsher punishments were established for any person, including government-designated imams, if such persons act "against the noble nature of the mosque" or act in a manner "likely to offend public cohesion." The amendments do not specify what actions would constitute such acts.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs provides some financial support to mosques and, in February 2005, created an Educational Commission within the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The commission is composed of 28 members in charge of developing an educational system for the learning of the Qur'an. The commission is supposed to set the rules for hiring teachers for the Qur'anic schools and madrassahs, and ensure that all imams are of the highest educational caliber, and present messages in line with government guidelines in place to stem Islamic fanaticism.

The law prohibits public assembly for purposes of practicing a faith other than Islam. Roman Catholic churches, however, including a cathedral in Algiers (the seat of the Archbishop), conduct services without government interference, as does a Protestant church. Since 1994, the size of the Jewish community has diminished to virtual nonexistence due to fears of terrorist violence, and the synagogue in Algiers has been closed. There are only a few small churches and other places of worship; non-Muslims usually congregate in private homes for religious services. Conversions from Islam to other religions are rare. Islamic law (Shari'a), as interpreted in the country, does not recognize conversion from Islam to any other religion; however, conversion is not illegal under civil law. Due to safety concerns and potential legal and social problems, Muslim converts practice their new faith clandestinely (see Section III). Christians report that conversions to Christianity take place without government sanction or interference.

Non-Islamic proselytizing is illegal. Missionary groups are permitted to conduct humanitarian activities without government interference as long as they are discreet and do not proselytize.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Commerce all must approve the importation of non-Islamic literature. Often, delays of 5 to 6 months are experienced in obtaining such approval, and there have been difficulties once these books have reached Customs. Arabic and Tamazight translations of non-Islamic texts are increasingly available, but the Government periodically has enforced restrictions on their importation. Individuals may bring personal copies of non-Islamic texts, such as the Bible, into the country. Occasionally, such works are sold in local bookstores in Algiers. In general, non-Islamic religious texts no longer are difficult to find, and there are two stores which sell Bibles in several different languages located at the Protestant and Roman Catholic places of worship. Non-Islamic religious music and video selections also are available. The government-owned radio stations provided broadcast time for a Protestant radio broadcast for Christmas and Easter. The Government prohibits the dissemination of any literature that portrays violence as a legitimate precept of Islam.

According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, female employees of the Government are allowed to wear the headscarf or crosses but forbidden from wearing the full veil, or "niqab." The Constitution prohibits non-Muslims from running for the presidency. Non-Muslims may hold other public offices and work within the Government; however, it is reported that they experience difficulties in achieving promotion to higher status.

The Ministries of Education and Religious Affairs strictly require, regulate, and fund the study of Islam in public schools. Private religious primary and secondary schools operate in the country; however, the Government did not extend recognition to these institutions during the reporting year, and, therefore, private school students must register as independent students within the public school system to take national baccalaureate examinations. In May, the Ministry of National Education required private schools to submit their educational programs for approval. The Government has given official authorization to only 22 of 200 private schools so far. This measure was widely directed toward insuring that schools supported by Saudi Arabia were conforming to Government standards of religious teaching.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs provides some financial support to mosques and pays the salary of imams. Mosque construction is funded through private contributions of local believers. Following the May 2003 earthquake, the Government assisted the reconstruction efforts of some Christian churches. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there are nine Christian religious workers funded by the Government.

Some aspects of the law and many traditional social practices discriminate against women. The Family Code, adopted in 1984 and amended in 2005, is based in large part on Shari'a law and treats women as minors under the legal guardianship of a husband or male relative. Under the Code, Muslim women are prevented from marrying non-Muslims, although this regulation was not always enforced. The Code does not restrict Muslim men from marrying non-Muslim women, but it prohibits men from marrying a woman of a non-monotheistic faith. Under both Shari'a and civil law, children born to a Muslim father are Muslim, regardless of the mother's religion. Custody of the children normally is awarded to the mother, but she

may not enroll them in a particular school or take them out of the country without the father's authorization. Under the 2005 Family Code amendments, women no longer need the consent of a male guardian (*tuteur*) to marry, merely the presence of a chaperone (*wali*), of her choosing, at the wedding. This change signaled a major step for women, as the role of a *tuteur*—usually a woman's father or another male relative—is to conclude the marriage on the woman's behalf, while a *wali* acts as a protector who is present while the woman concludes the marriage herself.

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

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

Anti-Semitism in state-owned publications and broadcasts is rare; however, anti-Semitic articles appear occasionally in the independent press, especially Arabic-language papers with an Islamic outlook. The Arabic-language newspapers *El Bilad* and *Ech-Chorouk El-Youmi* published articles expressing negative views about a visit to Tlemcen by Algerian-born French Jews, quoting a history professor who refused to meet with the visiting delegation. In *El Khabar* there was an inflammatory article about Algerian Jews demanding compensation for properties they left after 1962, when the French occupation of the country, generally supported by the Jewish community, ended. More frequent are articles criticizing the policies of the Israeli Government and leadership. There is no hate crime legislation.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

The country's decade-long civil conflict pitted self-proclaimed radical Muslims belonging to the Armed Islamic Group and its later offshoot, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, against moderate Muslims. While estimates vary, approximately 100,000 to 150,000 civilians, terrorists, and security forces have been killed during the past 13 years. Radical Islamic extremists have issued public threats against all "infidels" in the country, both foreigners and citizens, and have killed both Muslims and non-Muslims, including missionaries. Extremists continued attacks against both the Government and moderate Muslim and secular civilians; however, the level of violence perpetrated by these terrorists continued to decline during the reporting period. As a rule, the majority of the country's terrorist groups do not differentiate between religious and political killings.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, differences remain within the country's Muslim majority about the interpretation and practice of Islam. A very small number of citizens, such as Ibadi Muslims living in the desert town of Ghardaia, practice nonmainstream forms of Islam or practice other religions, but there is minimal societal discrimination against them.

In general, society tolerates noncitizens who practice faiths other than Islam; however, citizens who renounce Islam generally are ostracized by their families and shunned by their neighbors. The Government generally does not become involved in such disputes.

The majority of cases of harassment and security threats against non-Muslims come from radical Islamists who are determined to rid the country of those who do not share their extremist interpretation of Islam (see Section II). However, a majority of the population subscribes to Islamic precepts of tolerance in religious beliefs. Moderate Islamist religious and political leaders have criticized publicly acts of violence committed in the name of Islam. In 2005, a Protestant minister who was a highly respected longtime resident was stabbed outside his house in Algiers in what

is widely believed to be a religiously motivated attack. The High Islamic Council was quick to condemn the attack. On April 8, in a show of religious harmony, there was an overflow number of both Christian and Muslim attendees at a memorial Catholic Mass at Notre Dame d'Afrique Basilica honoring Pope John Paul II.

In honor of World AIDS Day, on December 5, 2004, an imam in one of the mosques of Algiers, with the blessing and encouragement of the Government, included a sermon requesting that Muslims protect themselves against the lethal disease of AIDS. On the following day the Islamic-leaning Arabic press berated the imam for "encouraging debauchery," but the Government supported the imam and the sermon.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Embassy maintained contact with religious leaders in the non-Muslim community, who expressed concerns that radical Islamists and government delays on the importation of religious materials were impediments to practicing their faith. Embassy officials also met with members of the Muslim community, including the Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs and moderate Islamic political parties. Embassy officials, and also a U.S. Senator, established a dialogue on religious freedom with the High Islamic Council. The Ambassador underscored the need for religious tolerance in several speeches and by funding two cultural restoration projects with religious significance for both Christians and Muslims. Embassy officials also promoted religious freedom in speeches to university students by describing the high level of tolerance that all faiths, including Islam, enjoy in the United States. The Embassy maintained contact with three Islamic political parties (Movement for Peaceful Society, El Islah, and former members of the defunct group Ennahda) and met with the Wafa Party, which remains unrecognized by the Government.

The Embassy maintained frequent contact with the National Consultative Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, a quasi-governmental human rights organization established by the Government in 2001 in response to international and domestic pressure to improve its human rights record. Individuals and groups who believe they are not being treated fairly by the Ministry of Religious Affairs may have their concerns heard by this commission.

BAHRAIN

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion and also provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on this freedom.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. In the past, the Government did not tolerate political dissent from religious groups or leaders; however, in 2001 the King pardoned and released all remaining political prisoners and religious leaders. In 2002, the King issued a new Constitution and held municipal council and National Assembly elections. The Government continues to subject both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to some governmental control and monitoring, and there continues to be government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims. Members of other religions who practice their faith privately do so without interference from the Government.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, Shi'a Muslims, who constitute the majority of the population, often resent minority Sunni Muslim rule.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 231 square miles, and its population is approximately 710,000. The citizen population is 98 percent Muslim; Jews and Christians constitute the remaining 2 percent. Muslim citizens belong to the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam, with Shi'a constituting as much as two-thirds of the indigenous population.

Foreigners, mostly from South Asia and other Arab countries, constitute an estimated 38 percent of the total population. Approximately half of resident foreigners are non-Muslim, including Christians, Jews, Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

The American Mission Hospital, which is affiliated with the National Evangelical Church, has operated in the country for more than a century. The church adjacent to the hospital holds weekly services and also serves as a meeting place for other Protestant denominations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion and also provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on this right. In the past, the Government did not tolerate political dissent from religious groups or leaders; however, in 2001 the King pardoned and released all remaining political prisoners and religious leaders, including Shi'a clerics. The Government continues to register new religious nongovernmental organizations, including some with the legal authority to conduct political activities. In 2002, the King issued a new Constitution and held municipal council and National Assembly elections. In the 2002 municipal council elections, candidates associated with religious political societies won 40 of the 50 contested seats. In the 2002 legislative election, candidates associated with religious groups won more than half of the Council of Representatives' 40 seats. In both elections, candidates from religious political societies conducted their campaigns without any interference from the Government. The Government continues to subject both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to some governmental control and monitoring, and there is some government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims. Members of other religions who practice their faith privately do so without interference from the Government and are permitted to maintain their own places of worship and display the symbols of their religion.

Every religious group must obtain a license from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to operate. Depending on circumstances, a religious group also may need approvals from the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Education (if the religious group wants to run a school). Thirteen Christian congregations, which were registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, operated freely and allowed other Christian congregations to use their facilities. A synagogue, four Sikh temples, and several official and unofficial Hindu temples are located in Manama, the capital, and its suburbs. In 2003, the Orthodox community celebrated the consecration of the new and expanded St. Mary's Church, which was built on land donated by other Christian groups that privately practice their faith without government interference.

In the past, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs had repeatedly denied a Baha'i community's request for a license to operate. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs stated that the Baha'i Faith is an offshoot of Islam. According to its official interpretation of Islam, the Government regards the core beliefs of Baha'is to be blasphemous and consequently illegal, and therefore the Ministry refuses to recognize the religion, but it allows the community to gather and worship freely. The Baha'i community has not sought official recognition in many years.

It is likely that unregistered Christian congregations exist, and there is no attempt by the Government to force them to register. Holding a religious meeting without a permit is illegal; however, there were no reports of religious groups being denied a permit to gather.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs is charged with the review and approval of all clerical appointments within both the Sunni and Shi'a communities and maintains program oversight for all citizens studying religion abroad. In 2002, a school emphasizing a Shi'a curriculum was established for the first time in the country.

The civil and criminal legal systems consist of a complex mix of courts based on diverse legal sources, including Sunni and Shi'a Shari'a (Islamic law), tribal law, and other civil codes and regulations. The number of Shi'a Shari'a judges is slightly higher than the number of Sunni Shari'a judges.

The country observes the Muslim feasts of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammed, and the Islamic New Year as national holidays. The Shi'a religious celebration of Ashura is a 2-day national holiday. The Shi'a stage large public processions during the holiday, and the Government does not restrict the religious elements of these events. The Ministry of Information provides full media coverage of Ashura events.

Leaders representing most religions and religious denominations visit the country and frequently meet with the Government and civic leaders. In January, a foreign evangelical Christian, Dr. Roger Houtsma, held a series of workshops on religion. World Council of Churches official Rt. Reverend Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, of the Mar Thoma Church, led Holy Week services in March. The Catholic Vicar Apostolic of Arabia visited in April.

In March, members of the Sacred Heart Church were granted permission to visit Christian prison inmates and distribute religious materials to them. In April, the Islamic Awareness Center opened with the goal of promoting understanding of Islam and building bridges with other faiths. The Islamic Enlightenment Society organized a conference in May aimed at diffusing tension between Muslim sects.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government funds, monitors, and closely controls all official religious institutions. These include Shi'a and Sunni mosques, Shi'a ma'tams (religious community centers), Shi'a and Sunni Waqfs (charitable foundations), and the religious courts, which represent both the Ja'fari (Shi'a) and Maliki (Sunni) schools of Islamic jurisprudence. While the Government rarely interferes with what it considers legitimate religious observations, in the past it actively suppressed any activity deemed overtly political. The Government permits public religious events, most notably the large annual commemorative marches by Shi'a, but police closely monitor such events. At least one unregistered ma'tam was established in March 2003. The Government has not hindered its activities.

In the past, the Government occasionally closed mosques and ma'tams for allowing political demonstrations to take place on or near their premises or to prevent religious leaders from delivering political speeches during Friday prayer and sermons; however, there were no reported closures of mosques or ma'tams during the reporting period. In past years, the Government detained religious leaders for delivering political sermons or for allowing such sermons to be delivered in their mosques. The Government also has appropriated or withheld funding to reward or punish particular individuals or places of worship. However, there were no reports of such detentions or funding restrictions during the reporting period.

Towns that were developed and expanded in the past 10 years, such as Hamad Town and Issa Town, have mixed Sunni and Shi'a populations. In these new areas, there are a greater number of Sunni than Shi'a mosques. In June, King Hamad approved the construction of a large Shi'a mosque on a site in Hamad Town that had been the subject of a dispute between the two branches of Islam.

The Government prohibits anti-Islamic writings; however, Bibles and other Christian publications are displayed and sold openly in local bookstores that also sell Islamic and other religious literature. Religious tracts of all branches of Islam, cassettes of sermons delivered by Muslim preachers from other countries, and publications of other religions are readily available. However, in the past few years the Ministry of Information prohibited the sale of 14 books written by Sunni authors who converted to Shi'ism. In addition, a government-controlled proxy server prohibits user access to Internet sites considered to be antigovernment or anti-Islamic. The software used is unreliable and often inhibits access to uncontroversial sites as well.

In March, residents of Muharraq submitted a petition to the Ministry of Information requesting that the government-run TV station make live broadcasts of Friday sermons from Shi'a mosques, and not just from Sunni mosques. According to the petitioners, a similar request sent to the Ministry in 2004 did not receive a response.

In 2004, the Ministry of Information banned Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of the Christ"; according to the Ministry, this decision was based on Islamic Shari'a prohibitions regarding the depiction of the Prophet Isa (Jesus).

There are no restrictions on the number of citizens permitted to make pilgrimages to Shi'a shrines and holy sites in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The Government monitors travel to Iran and scrutinizes carefully those who choose to pursue religious study there.

Although there are notable exceptions, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoys a favored status. Sunnis often receive preference for employment in sensitive government positions and in the managerial ranks of the civil service. Shi'a citizens do not hold significant posts in the defense and internal security forces, although they are allowed to be employed in the enlisted ranks. In September 2004, the Interior Ministry established a community police program to train 500 Shi'a men and women.

In 2002, the Government licensed for the first time a public school in Juffair whose Islamic Studies curriculum is designed to provide primary and secondary students with a foundation in the Ja'fari Shi'a school of Islam. The school began limited operations in 2002, and the Prime Minister officiated at the official opening in early 2005. The Shi'a Al Islamiya bloc in the Council of Representatives (COR) proposed early in 2005 that the country's public schools teach the four main Sunni schools of thought and the Ja'fari school. The proposal was rejected by the Services Committee and by the COR.

Since 1950, a registered Christian church with over 4,000 members has sought a parcel of land from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs on which to build its own

church and hold religious services. The Ministry has not responded to its formal applications. The National Evangelical Church allows this church to use its facilities for early morning services. However, the facility can only accommodate at any one time half of the church's congregation.

Since 1985, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs verbally has denied Shi'a applications and petitions to establish a mosque and ma'tam in Riffa to serve that community's Shi'a population. Riffa constitutes approximately 40 percent of the country's land and is home to the Sunni ruling family. In 2004, the Ministry of the Royal Court formally denied the application, citing that land in Riffa cannot be allocated for commercial enterprises since it is reserved for the ruling family.

The political dynamic of Sunni predominance in the past has led to incidents of unrest between the Shi'a community and the Government. There were no reports of significant religious unrest during the reporting period.

In 2003, the Ministry of Interior lifted its ban on policewomen wearing headscarves (hijab). Also in 2003, by Royal Decree, the King allowed women to drive while fully veiled. In July 2004, the Ministry of Defense lifted its ban on growing beards, a common practice among many Muslims. All military personnel who had been released for growing beards were reinstated. In August 2004, the Cabinet reviewed a proposal to permit men to grow long beards and women to wear face-covering veils (niqab) while working for government departments.

Shari'a governs the personal legal rights of women, although the new Constitution provides for women's political rights. Specific rights vary according to Shi'a or Sunni interpretations of Islamic law, as determined by the individual's faith, or by the courts in which various contracts, including marriage, have been made. While both Shi'a and Sunni women have the right to initiate a divorce, religious courts may refuse the request. Although local religious courts may grant a divorce to Shi'a women in routine cases, occasionally Shi'a women seeking divorce under unusual circumstances must travel abroad to seek a higher ranking opinion than that available in the country. Women of either branch of Islam may own and inherit property and may represent themselves in all public and legal matters. In the absence of a direct male heir, a Shi'a woman may inherit all property. In contrast, in the absence of a direct male heir, a Sunni woman inherits only a portion as governed by Shari'a; the balance is divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased. A Muslim woman may legally marry a non-Muslim man only if he first converts to Islam. In such marriages, the children automatically are considered Muslim.

In divorce cases, the courts routinely grant Shi'a and Sunni women custody of daughters under the age of 9 and sons under age 7, when custody usually reverts to the father. In all circumstances except mental incapacitation, the father, regardless of custody decisions, retains the right to make certain legal decisions for his children, such as guardianship of any property belonging to the child, until the child reaches legal age. A noncitizen woman automatically loses custody of her children if she divorces their citizen father.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period of internal strife in the 1980's and 1990's, the Government held in detention hundreds of Shi'a, including religious leaders, for offenses involving "national security." There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners during the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Although there are exceptions, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoys a favored status. In the private sector, Shi'a tend to be employed in lower paid, less skilled jobs. Educational, social, and municipal services in most Shi'a neighborhoods are inferior to those found in Sunni communities. To remedy social inequalities, the Government has built numerous subsidized housing complexes, which are open to all citizens on the basis of financial need.

Converts from Islam to other religions are not well tolerated by society, which leads some small groups to worship in their homes.

In 2002, 70 graves at the St. Christopher's Church cemetery were desecrated. The Government paid to restore the graveyard. No reports on the investigations into this incident have been issued.

In 2003, unknown assailants vandalized the Sa'sa'a Mosque. Witnesses reported that four persons broke into the mosque and destroyed the ablution faucets and lights surrounding the mosque. The Director of the government-funded agency responsible for managing government-held Shi'a properties (Ja'fari Awqaf) did not seek police assistance or an investigation; however, the mosque caretaker has closed the mosque daily at 4:30 p.m., denying Shi'a parishioners the ability to perform evening prayers.

In 2004, unknown assailants vandalized the Zainab mosque. The mosque restrooms were rendered inoperable. The assailants destroyed all water faucets, fans, electrical switches, lamps, microphones, clocks, and audiotapes. The Director of the Ja'fari Awqaf sought police assistance to investigate the crime.

There were no acts of physical violence or harassment of Jews or vandalism of Jewish community institutions, such as schools, synagogues, or cemeteries. The Government has not enacted any laws protecting the right of Jews to religious freedom; however, it has not interfered with their freedom to practice. The Government makes no effort specifically to promote anti-bias and tolerance education. Some anti-Semitic political commentary and editorial cartoons appeared, usually linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

With U.S. Government funding, Arab Civitas is helping the Ministry of Education develop a civic education program for public schools that includes lessons on human rights and tolerance. In 2003 and 2004, the Embassy worked with the Ministry of Education to create and implement a new English language curriculum that stresses respect for persons of different religious backgrounds.

In March, an Embassy official met with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs Undersecretary to discuss future efforts to promote religious harmony.

In June, a prominent religious scholar from the country participated in a U.S. Government-sponsored program in the United States on promoting interfaith dialogue.

EGYPT

The Constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, although the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Islam is the official state religion and Shari'a (Islamic law) is the primary source of legislation; religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited. Members of the non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the Government generally worship without harassment and may maintain links with co-religionists in other countries; however, members of religions that are not recognized by the Government, particularly the Baha'i Faith, experience personal and collective hardship.

In some areas, there were improvements in the Government's respect for religious freedom; however, there continued to be abuses and restrictions during the period covered by this report. The National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), established in January 2004 and entrusted with protecting and improving the status of human rights, including religious freedom, issued its first report in March 2005. Although the Council did not give significant attention to issues of religious freedom, it submitted numerous requests to the Ministry of Interior requesting action on complaints it had received regarding church repair and construction.

Mohamed El-Derini, one of a group of nine Shi'a Muslims arrested by the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) in 2003 and March 2004, apparently because of their religious beliefs, was released in June 2005 after having spent 15 months in administrative detention. Derini was freed following four separate rulings by the Supreme State Security Emergency Court ordering his release and an advisory opinion issued by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. There are credible reports that SSIS repeatedly tortured and mistreated Derini and the other detainees while in custody.

Metwalli Ibrahim Metwalli Saleh, arrested by SSIS in May 2003 apparently because of his progressive views on Islam, remained in detention despite five separate

rulings from the Supreme State Security Emergency Court and an official statement from the state security prosecutor ordering his release. Saleh, age 51, is being held in Al-Wadi al-Gadid Prison, near Assiut.

Despite decrees issued by President Mubarak in 1998 and 1999 to facilitate approvals for repairing, renovating, expanding, and building churches, some local security and governmental officials continued to hinder efforts by Christians to obtain the permits required for such construction, an attitude encouraged by the 1856 Hamayouni decree and the 1934 El-Ezabi decree.

Tradition and some aspects of the law discriminated against religious minorities, including Christians and particularly Baha'is. The Government also continued to deny civil documents, including identity cards, birth certificates and marriage licenses, to members of the small Baha'i community. In the past, the Government did not provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status. Approximately eight Muslims who had converted from Christianity were issued verdicts allowing recovery of their original Christian identities. However, this has not yet been tested in courts in the case of citizens originally Muslim who converted to Christianity. The Government also continued to prosecute a small number of citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs and practices alleged to "insult heavenly religions."

There continued to be religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society during the period covered by this report. In early December 2004, a three-way standoff at Cairo's Abbasiya Cathedral involving security forces, orthodox church officials, and several thousand Christian protestors ended with the return of Wafaa' Constantin, the wife of a Coptic Orthodox priest in the Nile Delta province of Beheira, to the protective custody of the church following her apparent elopement with a Muslim man and conversion to Islam in late November 2004. Although dozens of protestors and police were injured during the standoff, police did not respond with decisive force and made a notable effort to cooperate with Church authorities. However, a citizen filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Interior (MOI)—responsible for handing Constantin back to the church—demanding Constantin's whereabouts. The exact course of events that led to the Constantin controversy, including her subsequent return to Christianity, remained unclear at the end of the reporting period.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador, senior administration officials, and members of Congress continued to raise U.S. concerns about religious discrimination with senior government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 370,308 square miles, and its population is approximately 72 million, of whom almost 90 percent are estimated to be Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims constitute less than 1 percent of the population. Estimates of the percentage of Christians in the population range from the Government's unofficial estimate of 8 percent (approximately 5.6 million) to Christian estimates of 12 to 15 percent (approximately 8.6 to 10.8 million), the majority of whom belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Other Christian communities include the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melkite, Roman, and Syrian Catholic), Maronite, and Orthodox (Greek and Syrian) churches. An evangelical Protestant church, established in the middle of the 19th century, now includes 16 Protestant denominations. There also are followers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was granted legal status in the 1960s. There are small numbers of Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, but the Government does not recognize either group. The non-Muslim, non-Coptic Orthodox communities range in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands. The number of Baha'is is estimated at approximately 2,000. The Jewish community numbers fewer than 200 persons.

Christians are dispersed throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians tends to be higher in Upper Egypt (the southern part of the country) and some sections of Cairo and Alexandria.

There are many foreign religious groups, especially Roman Catholics and Protestants, who have had a presence in the country for almost a century. These groups engage predominately in education, social, and development work. The Government generally tolerates these groups if they do not proselytize. However, the Government has acted on a number of occasions over the past several years to refuse reentry into the country of individuals suspected of proselytizing.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, under Article 46, provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites; however, the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Islam is the official state religion, and Shari'a is the primary source of legislation; religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited. Members of the non-Muslim religious minorities generally worship without legal harassment and may maintain links with co-religionists in other countries. Members of other religions that are not recognized by the Government, particularly the Baha'i Faith, continue to experience personal and collective hardship.

For a religious group to be officially recognized it must submit a request to the Religious Affairs Department at the Ministry of Interior, which determines whether it would pose a threat or upset national unity or social peace. The Religious Affairs Department also consults the leading religious figures in the country, particularly the Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Sheikh of Al-Azhar. The registration is then referred to the President, who issues a decree recognizing the new group, according to Law 15 of 1927. If a religious group chooses to bypass the official registration process, participants are subject to detention and could also face prosecution and punishment under Article 98(F) of the Penal Code, which forbids the "ridiculing of a heavenly religion." The Government last recognized a new religious group—First Bible Baptist Folk—in 1990.

Article 19 of the Constitution requires elementary and secondary public schools to offer religious instruction. Public and private schools provide religious instruction according to the faith of the student.

While there is no legal requirement for a Christian girl or woman to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim man, conversion to Islam has been used to circumvent the legal prohibition on marriage under the age of 16 or marriage between the ages of 16 and 21 without the approval and presence of the girl's guardian. Egyptian law recognizes the willing conversion to Islam of any person over age 16.

The Government continued to encourage interfaith dialogue. The religious establishment of Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Awqaf (Islamic Religious Endowments) engaged in interfaith discussions, both domestically and abroad. Domestically, a Muslim-Christian conference in March, organized by the International Islamic Forum and the Middle East Council of Churches, included dialogue on cooperation, mutual respect, family values, and peaceful coexistence. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Tantawi and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda presided over opening ceremonies. Government literacy programs promoted reading materials that encourage mutual tolerance. In January 2004, the Government formed the National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), which was entrusted with protecting, supporting, developing, upholding, and improving the status of human rights, including religious freedom. The Government appointed a Coptic Christian as president and named prominent Copts to 5 of the Council's 25 seats. The Council released its first report in March. Although the Council did not give significant attention in its report to issues of religious freedom, it submitted a total of 27 requests to the Ministry of Interior and several governorates in Upper Egypt requesting action on numerous complaints it had received concerning alleged violations of religious freedom. Twenty-three of the requests the Council submitted dealt with church repair and construction; however, according to the Council's report, the Ministry of Interior had not responded to any of the requests.

The following religious holy days are designated national holidays: Eid Al-Fitr, Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic new year, the birth of the Prophet Muhammed, and Coptic Christmas (January 7).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

All mosques must be licensed, and the Government attempts to control them legally for the stated purpose of combating extremists. The Government appoints and pays the salaries of the imams who lead prayers in mosques, and it monitors their sermons; however, it does not contribute to the funding of Christian churches. During the reporting period, the Minister of Awqaf announced that of the more than 92,500 mosques in the country, the Government controls administratively 74,500 regular mosques and 18,000 mosques located in private buildings. The Government annexes new mosques every year, but the process does not keep pace with new mosque construction; however, a February 2004 decree from the Minister of Awqaf deprived governors of unilaterally issuing permits to build mosques and placed mosques in private homes under Awqaf administrative control.

The contemporary interpretation of the 1856 Ottoman Hamayouni decree, partially still in force, requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to enlarge or build places of worship. In addition, Interior Ministry regulations, issued in 1934 under the Al-Ezabi decree, specify a set of 10 conditions that the Government must consider prior to issuance of a presidential decree permitting construction of a church. The conditions include the requirement that the distance between a church and a mosque not be less than 100 meters and that the approval of the neighboring Muslim community be obtained.

In 1999, President Mubarak issued Decree 453, making the repair of all places of worship subject to a 1976 civil construction code. This decree places repair of churches and mosques on equal footing under the law. However, permits for such repairs are still subject to approval by local administrative and security officials. Even though mosque and church repairs are now subject to the same laws, authorities enforce the laws more strictly for churches than for mosques. Security officials also sometimes deny or delay permits for the supply of water and electricity. Incidents of blocked or delayed permits vary, often depending on the attitude of local security officials and the governorate leadership toward the church, and on their personal relationships with representatives of the Christian churches.

According to statistics published by the Government's Official Gazette, 12 Presidential decrees were issued from July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005, for church-related construction, compared with seven permits reported during the previous period. 6 of these 12 permits were for evangelical Christian churches, 5 for Coptic churches, and 1 for a Catholic church. Government officials have previously asserted that the Government approves a much larger number of projects for church construction and expansion, through informal arrangements between church authorities and local security and administrative officials. Overall, the approval process for church construction continued to be hindered by time delays often measured in years, and the Government continued to be insufficiently responsive to the requests of Christians.

In his April 26 broadcast on national television, President Mubarak, answering a question about whether the same standards for issuing permits to construct places of worship are applied to both Copts and Muslims, stated that the problem of issuing permits to build churches had been addressed by the Government and that all Egyptians are treated equally in this regard. However, in practice, local administrative and/or security officials severely restrict this right. Although President Mubarak reportedly has approved all requests for permits presented to him, some Christians maintain that the Interior Ministry delays—in some instances indefinitely—submission of their requests to the President. They also maintain that security forces have blocked them from using permits that have been issued and at times denied them permits for repairs to church buildings and the supply of water and electricity to existing church facilities. Christian observers believe that government officials, particularly at the local security level, zealously enforce regulations pertaining to church projects while exercising lax oversight of the repair and construction of mosques.

In March 2004, the country's Supreme Constitutional Court dismissed a case that an individual brought against the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Court ruled that the Constitution required Christian and Muslim endowments be treated under an equal standard and that Christian endowments, like Muslim endowments, could not be sued. Christian advocates hoped the judgment would set a precedent for "equal treatment" between Islamic and Christian facilities, with implications for legal cases relative to construction and repair of churches.

Despite this ruling, numerous complaints of delayed church construction and repair projects continued to be reported during the period covered by this report. Elements within the Government, often local administrative and/or security officials, continued to impede several stages of church repair and construction projects by refusing to issue permits for new churches, preventing the implementation of pre-construction permits for new churches, failing to enforce restoration and renovation decrees, and closing unlicensed church buildings.

Targeting the first stage of church repair and construction, local government officials continued to prevent new churches from being built, often requiring an exhaustive list of documents to be submitted multiple times between administrative and security departments of governorates, in repeated attempts to preclude final authorization, despite Presidential and MOI approvals for a building permit to be issued. As a result, congregations have experienced lengthy delays—lasting for years in many cases—while waiting for new church building permits to be issued.

The Assiut bishopric has been waiting for local officials to issue a building permit for a new church in the governorate's Arbaeen District, despite a 1997 order from the President and approval from the Ministry of Interior to issue the decree. Similar

fate has befallen residents in Assiut's El Hamra District in their attempt to build a new church since 1997, and Christian residents of the industrial town of Burg al Arab, Alexandria Governorate, to build an orthodox church since 1988. The Brothers denomination, also in Assiut Governorate, received a permit to build a church in 2001, but local police stopped construction of the building's foundation.

After a wait of 18 years, St. George Church in Dafesh, a majority Christian community near Assiut, Upper Egypt, obtained approval from the local governor in 2000 to build a new church to replace the original building, which had grown too small to accommodate the growing community. Shortly after construction began in 2000, the new site was vandalized, allegedly by local Muslim residents. The Government halted construction, ostensibly because the church had only obtained local approval and not a presidential decree, required to either build a new church or expand an existing church. Construction remained halted at the end of the period covered by this report. The congregation continued to worship at the older site.

Authorities have also refused to issue decrees for restoration, renovation, and expansion of churches, or have failed to enforce decrees that have already been approved.

In 1999, the governor of Assiut issued a decree to St. John the Baptist at Awlad Elias in Sadfa, near Assiut, stating that the Orthodox church was given license to effect several remodeling projects and restoration projects. In 2001, however, Sadfa police halted repairs, because authorities believed that the church would enlarge its size by extending the building into the churchyard. After negotiations with State Security, the church received permission to demolish a wall to extend its size. However, after the newspaper *Watani* published an article exposing this issue and the outcome, State Security officials halted construction a second time. As of the end of June, construction had not resumed, and the church was still waiting for the MOI to permit resumption of repairs. The congregation was forced to build a tent in the small church courtyard to conduct prayers.

In August 2001, Assiut's governor approved the restoration of Mar Guirguis Church in Sahel Selim. In November 2001, the permit was issued. Local authorities, however, required that the church obtain approval from the Supreme Council of Antiquities to prove that the building was not registered as a historic monument. When the church duly obtained the required approval in October 2003, however, security authorities then summoned the priest to sign a pledge agreeing not to renovate the church or construct new buildings. Additionally, an official technical committee inspected the church and determined in March 2004 that the building was not structurally sound enough to undergo renovation. However, on June 20, 2005, the church was granted a presidential decree allowing it to construct a new building.

In Ezbet al-Nakhl, East Cairo, Coptic leaders of the Church of the Archangel Mikhail received permission from the Ministry of Interior in 1996, ratified by the Governor of Cairo in 2001, to expand the church to accommodate its growing congregation. However, local authorities in the district of al-Marg refused to accept the request to expand the church without a presidential decree, which was required for the renovation. The church, which had originally sought a presidential decree in 1987, had not been able to obtain one, and the project remained frozen at the end of the period covered by this report. Government officials asserted that the project was frozen because church officials did not employ the proper procedures while seeking a presidential decree, therefore making it illegal to renovate the church.

Local authorities have employed a number of tactics to close down unlicensed buildings used as places of worship. The Apostolic Church in Abowan, Minya Governorate, is an unlicensed church that has been used as a place for worship since 1984. On April 5, 2005, the local building authority sent a structural inspection team to evaluate the building, despite having not been requested by church authorities to do so. On May 9, State Security then summoned the pastor, ordered that he remove the sign bearing the name of the church, and informed him that the building would be demolished in 15 days per the inspection team's report that it was structurally unsound.

At the unlicensed Evangelical Church in Maadi, police reportedly halted a reconstruction project in November 2004 and prevented church members from entering the church. For 50 years, the church has been unable to obtain a licensing permit.

In 2002, the Government ordered the closure of a building in Tenth of Ramadan City, east of Cairo, used as a training and conference center by the Protestant Qasr al-Doubbara Church of Central Cairo. The church successfully fought the closure, obtaining a government decree in November 2003 that ordered the reopening of the facility. However, the municipality appealed the decision and continued to block use of the building on the grounds that the building, which is zoned as a residence, did not have a permit for it to operate as a public building. In April, 2005, a court ruled

in favor of the church, ordering the building to be reopened. The building is again being used as a training and conference center.

As a result of restrictions, some communities use private buildings and apartments for religious services or build without permits.

On April 10, an unlicensed church hall in Baghour village, Menoufiya Governorate, was burned down by unknown arsonists. Nine Coptic Christians received minor injuries. The local governor supported rebuilding the facility. It was unclear whether there was an investigation into the arson.

The Government continued to try citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs. On March 31, the Maadi misdemeanor court issued a verdict in a blasphemy case involving Ibrahim Ahmad Abu Shusha and 11 of his followers, who had been detained absent an arrest warrant since early July 2004. The court sentenced Abu Shusha to 3 years' imprisonment, for claiming to be divine and for ridiculing a heavenly religion, namely Islam. The court sentenced the 11 other defendants (including 3 women, 2 of whom are Abu Shusha's wives) to 1 year imprisonment and ordered the confiscation of the leaflets and writings that propagated the group's ideology. In its reasoning, the court stated that there was sufficient evidence that Abu Shusha embraced beliefs that are contrary to and derogatory of Islam, and that he tried to propagate those beliefs by attempting to show that he possessed divine powers. The court also asserted that freedom of belief does not comprise permission to deny the principles of heavenly religions.

The law states that Political parties based on religion are illegal. Pursuant to this law, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is an illegal organization. Muslim Brothers speak openly and publicly about their views and have recently been identifying themselves publicly as members of the organization, although they remain subject to arbitrary treatment and pressure from the Government. During the period covered by this report, hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested and charged with membership in an illegal organization, planning to revive the activities of the banned group, possessing anti-government leaflets, obstructing the constitution and the law of the country, and organizing demonstrations without obtaining prior security permission. Authorities prevented several other members from traveling abroad. In April, MB leader Essam El Erian twice was prevented from traveling to Damascus and Algeria, while Muhammad Gamal Heshmat was prevented from going to Algeria. On the other hand, authorities allowed Supreme Guide Mahdi Akef to go to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage, although his name is on the list of persons prohibited from traveling abroad. On June 19, 2005, the Public Prosecutor ordered the release of 463 recently arrested MB members and announced that only 37 MB members remained in detention. On June 20, however, MB Supreme Guide Mahdy Akef asserted that 309 MB members remained in detention. Authorities arrested Erian on May 6, 2005, and at the end of the reporting period, he remained in detention; he was reportedly planning to run for President.

Seventeen independent candidates backed by the Muslim Brotherhood were elected to the People's Assembly in the 2000 parliamentary elections, despite government-sponsored efforts to stop them, which mainly included limiting access to polling stations but also sometimes included government-sponsored violence, detentions, and arrests. Two of the 17 lost their seats in 2004 for reported electoral irregularities, while another member was able to win a seat in the 2004 Shura Council elections. In June 2004, MB member Akram Zuhairy died while in police custody. The MB claimed torture and medical negligence were the cause of death; a prosecution investigation concluded he died when he fell while being transferred to prison and hit his head. On May 6, 2005, MB member Tareq El Ghannam died while taking part in an anti-government demonstration in Daqhaliyya Governorate. The MB claimed security forces caused Ghannam's death by beating him and using tear gas; Ghannam's brother claimed he died because MB members refused to allow the ambulance to reach him.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of authors facing trial or charges related to writings or statements considered heretical during the reporting period.

Various ministries are legally authorized to ban or confiscate books and other works of art upon obtaining a court order. The Council of Ministers may order the banning of works that it deems offensive to public morals, detrimental to religion, or likely to cause a breach of the peace. The Islamic Research Center (IRC) at Al-Azhar University has legal authority to censor, and as of June 2004, to confiscate, all publications dealing with the Qur'an and the authoritative Islamic Traditions (Hadith). In recent years, the IRC has passed judgment on the suitability of nonreligious books and artistic productions, and there were several new cases of confiscation during the period covered by this report. Al-Azhar has the legal right to recommend confiscation, but the actual act of confiscation requires a court order.

In 2003, the Ministry of Justice issued a decree authorizing Al-Azhar sheikhs to confiscate publications, tapes, speeches, and artistic materials deemed inconsistent with Islamic law.

In 2003, the IRC recommended banning the book "Discourse and Interpretations" by Nasr Abou Zeid. IRC member Dr. Mohammed Emara was quoted as claiming the book contradicted Islamic tenets. The Government did not act on the recommendation by the end of the reporting period.

In May 2004, the IRC formally recommended banning four books: Nawal El Sadawi's "The Fall of the Imam;" Iskander Shaheen's "Freemasonry: Religion or Fraud;" Ali Youssef's "The Call of Consciousness;" and Hisham El Bahrani's "City of Miracles." Sadawi's book was first published 20 years ago and has been translated into 14 languages. Although the IRC's recommended bans led to widespread criticism from writers and human rights activists, the Ministry of Justice decided in June 2004 to authorize al-Azhar's "inspectors" to seize publications, tapes, speeches, and artistic material that deviated from the IRC's interpretation of Shari'a. Prior to June 1, the IRC could not confiscate books it disapproved of without first seeking a court order.

In August 2004, the IRC banned "The Responsibility for the Failure of the Islamic State," by Gamal El Banna, a liberal Islamist thinker. The IRC ruled that Gamal El Banna's book deviated from Islamic orthodoxy, and the IRC began efforts to confiscate the book from the marketplace. In October 2004, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights issued a report which criticized IRC's book confiscations, terming them "a hammer blow to freedom of thought."

In September 2004, the Alexandria Administrative Court heard a lawsuit filed by lawyer Nabih al-Wahsh demanding the confiscation of a book, "The Hijab: A Modernist Approach," by Ikbal Baraka. The suit also sought the dismissal of Baraka as chief editor of Hawwa Magazine and her dismissal from the Press Syndicate. The suit alleged that Baraka's book denied the religious sanction for the veiling of women. The suit also charged the ministers of culture, aviation, education, and information, as well as the Grand Imam of al-Azhar University, with failure to block Baraka's book. A wide cross-section of writers and intellectuals, including Islamist writers, have criticized the effort to ban Baraka's book.

The local media, including state television and newspapers with some governmental oversight, gives prominence to Islamic programming, which implies the primacy of Islam among "the heavenly religions." The weekly religion page of the prominent daily al-Ahram, a privately funded newspaper with some governmental oversight, often reports on conversions to Islam and states that converts improved their lives and found peace and moral stability, things the converts said they lacked in their previous faith. While Christian television programs are aired on state-owned Nile TV, they are not presented on a regular basis.

Pope Shenouda has banned Coptic travel to Jerusalem since the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979. However, press reports indicated that an estimated 735 Egyptian Copts visited Israel in 2004 for pilgrimage, citing Israeli Interior Ministry statistics.

Law 263 of 1960, still in force, bans Baha'i institutions and community activities, and a 1961 Presidential decree stripped Baha'is of legal recognition. During the Nasser era, the Government confiscated all Baha'i community properties, including Baha'i centers, libraries, and cemeteries. The problems of Baha'is, who number fewer than 2,000 persons in the country, were compounded when the MOI began to upgrade its automation of civil records, including national identity cards. The Government has asserted that its new software requires all citizens to be categorized as Muslims, Christians, or Jews. Baha'is and other religious groups who do not fit into any of these categories have been compelled either to misrepresent themselves as members of one of these three religions or to go without valid identity documents. Most Baha'is have chosen the latter course. The Government's unwillingness to issue Baha'is identity cards and other necessary documents made it increasingly difficult for Baha'is to register their children in school, to open bank accounts, and to register businesses. Baha'is at age 16 face additional problems under Law 143/1994, which makes it mandatory for all citizens to obtain a new identification card featuring a new National Identification number. Police, often on public buses, conduct random inspections of identity papers, and those found without their identity card are regularly detained until the document is provided to the police. Some Baha'is, unable to receive identity cards, frequently stay home to avoid police scrutiny and possible arrest.

In May 2004, the Government confiscated the identity cards of two Baha'is who were applying for passports. Officials told them that they were acting on instructions from the MOI to confiscate any identity cards belonging to Baha'is.

During the reporting period, some Baha'is reported that government representatives offered to issue them passports, but no other documents. The Baha'i leadership noted that while this would enable them to leave the country, it would not facilitate their continued residence in the country.

Despite the Government's claim that it is unable to issue identity documents without Jewish, Christian, or Muslim designation, there is evidence that, on rare occasion, the Ministry of Interior has issued documents that list a citizen's religion as "other" or "-" or simply do not include mention of religion.

In 1997, a human rights activist filed a lawsuit seeking the removal of the religious affiliation category from government identification cards. The plaintiff challenged the constitutionality of a 1994 decree by the MOI governing the issuance of new identification cards. A hearing scheduled for February 25, 2005, never took place. The court informed the attorney for the plaintiff that the case documents had been withdrawn and forwarded to the president of the State's Council, a highly unusual procedure. A new hearing date was set for October 14.

During a nationally televised interview on April 26, President Mubarak stated that as far as he was concerned "Muslim, Copt and Jew are one and the same—they are all citizens of this country with no difference between them." However, he made no reference to citizens having other beliefs, such as Baha'is or agnostics.

Legal ambiguity also concerns the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), or Mormons, in Cairo. The LDS Church has maintained an organized congregation in Egypt for over 30 years, though without formal legal recognition. The Government is aware of the activities of the congregation and has raised no objection so long as no proselytizing of citizens occurs; however, excessive attention from State Security has been a problem for individual citizen members who attempted to participate in meetings, particularly those who have converted to the LDS Church overseas and then returned to Egypt. According to credible sources in the LDS community, citizen members sometimes avoid meetings out of fear of harassment from State Security.

The Constitution provides for equal public rights and duties without discrimination based on religion or creed, and in general the Government upholds these constitutional protections; however, government discrimination against non-Muslims exists. There are no Christians serving as governors or as presidents or deans of public universities, and they are rarely nominated by the Government to run in elections as National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates. As of June 30, there were 7 Christians (4 appointed; 3 elected) in the 454-seat People's Assembly, 6 Christians (all appointed) in the 264-seat Shura Council, and 2 Christians in the 32-member Cabinet. Christians, who represent approximately 10 percent of the population, held less than 2 percent of the seats in the People's Assembly and Shura Council.

There are few Christians in the upper ranks of the security services and armed forces. Government discriminatory practices continued to include discrimination against Christians in the public sector, discrimination against Christians in staff appointments to public universities, payment of Muslim imams through public funds (Christian clergy are paid by private church funds), and refusal to admit Christians to Al-Azhar University (a publicly-funded institution). In general, public university training programs for Arabic language teachers refuse to admit non-Muslims because the curriculum involves the study of the Qur'an. There have been no reports of Christian graduates since 2001.

Anti-Semitic sentiments appeared in both the pro-government and opposition press. Anti-Semitic articles and opinion pieces appeared in the print media, and editorial cartoons appeared in the press and electronic media. For example, on June 24 and July 1, 2004, the National Democratic Party (NDP) newspaper al-Lewa al-Islami published articles by Professor Refaat Sayed Ahmed in which he denied the Holocaust. On August 25, 2004, the NDP announced that it had banned Professor Ahmed from future publishing, that the editor who approved his article had been fired, and that the NDP and the Government rejected anti-Semitism and acknowledged the reality of the Holocaust.

The Government reportedly has advised journalists and cartoonists to avoid anti-Semitism. Government officials insist that anti-Semitic statements in the media are a reaction to Israeli government actions against Palestinians and do not reflect historical anti-Semitism; however, there are relatively few public attempts to distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli sentiment.

In January 2004, the Supreme Administrative Court upheld a lower court's 2001 decision to ban an annual festival (for Jewish pilgrims) at the tomb of Rabbi Abu Hasira in a village in the Nile Delta and rejected the Ministry of Culture's designation of the site as a protected antiquity. The 2001 decision linked the status of the site and the festival to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the celebration has not

been held in the past 3 years. There were reports in January 2005 that Jewish pilgrims again celebrated the Abu Hasira festival.

The application of family law, including marriage, divorce, alimony, child custody, and burial, is based on an individual's religion. In the practice of family law, the Government recognizes only the three "heavenly religions": Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Muslim families are subject to Shari'a, Christian families are subject to Canon law, and Jewish families are subject to Jewish law. In cases of family law disputes involving a marriage between a Christian woman and a Muslim man, the courts apply the Shari'a. The Government does not recognize the marriages of citizens adhering to faiths other than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

Under Shari'a, as practiced in the country, non-Muslim males must convert to Islam to marry Muslim women, but non-Muslim women need not convert to marry Muslim men. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men.

Inheritance laws for all citizens are based on the Government's interpretation of Shari'a. Muslim female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir's inheritance, while Christian widows of Muslims have no inheritance rights. A sole female heir receives half her parents' estate; the balance goes to designated male relatives. A sole male heir inherits all his parents' property. Male Muslim heirs face strong social pressure to provide for all family members who require assistance; however, this assistance is not always provided.

Under Shari'a, converts from Islam lose all rights of inheritance; however, because the Government offers no legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status, inheritance rights may appear not to have been lost.

The law provides for khul' divorce, which allows a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided that she is willing to forego all of her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. In practice, some judges have not applied the law accurately or fairly, causing lengthy bureaucratic delays for the thousands of women who have filed for khul' divorce. Many women who have complained that after being granted khul', the required child alimony is not paid.

The Coptic Orthodox Church excommunicates women members who marry Muslim men and requires that other Christians convert to Coptic Orthodoxy to marry a member of the Church. Coptic males are prevented from marrying Muslim women by both civil and religious laws. A civil marriage abroad is an option should a Christian male and an Egyptian Muslim female decide to marry; however, if the couple returned to Egypt, their marriage would not be legally recognized. Additionally, the woman could be arrested and charged with apostasy, and any children from such a marriage could be taken and assigned to the physical custody of a male Muslim guardian, as determined by the Government's interpretation of Shari'a. The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in specific circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In June 2004, the Court of Cassation, the country's highest appellate court, upheld the acquittal of 94 of 96 suspects who were charged with various offenses committed during the early 2000 sectarian violence in the town of al-Kush, which left 21 Christians dead. The Court's decision left public prosecutors and human rights activists with no further legal options.

In an earlier incident, Shayboub William Aarsal, a Coptic Christian, was convicted and sentenced for the 1998 murders of two Copts in al-Kush. His appeal, which has been pending for 5 years, had not been heard. The local Christian community believed that Shayboub was accused and convicted of the crime because of his religion.

Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Center issued a fatwa, or legal opinion, in December 2003 condemning Baha'is as apostates.

The Government at times prosecutes members of religious groups whose practices are deemed to deviate from mainstream Islamic beliefs, and whose activities are alleged to jeopardize communal harmony. Shiite Muslim Mohamed Ramadan Hussein El-Derini, arrested in March 2004 apparently because of his religious beliefs, was released in June, 2005, after having spent 15 months in administrative detention without charge or trial. Derini was freed following four separate rulings by the Supreme State Security Emergency Court ordering his release and an advisory opinion issued by the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Following each ruling by the court, the Minister of Interior issued a new administrative detention decree, nullifying the court's release order. There were credible reports that members of the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) repeatedly tortured and mistreated Derini in custody. Derini's arrest came in the wake of the arrests of at least eight other Shi'a Muslims in 2003 in the town of Ras Gharib, again apparently due to their af-

filiation with Shi'a Islam, which is not officially recognized by the Government but acknowledged as a branch of Islam by Al-Azhar. Five were released within several weeks, but three, Adel el-Shazli, Ahmed Gom'a, and Mohammed Hama Omar, were sent to prison in Cairo and Wadi Natroun for interrogation. As in Derini's case, there were credible reports that security forces tortured and mistreated these three individuals while in detention. Goma'a was released on April 29, 2004; El-Shazli in June 2004; and Mohammed Omar in August 2004.

In May 2003, SSIS arrested Metwalli Ibrahim Metwalli Saleh, apparently because of his progressive views on Islam. Metwalli's unpublished research, which he distributed to religious scholars and several embassies prior to his arrest, refuted the idea that it is a Muslim's religious duty to kill an "apostate" and also argued that Islam permits a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man. SSIS detained Saleh, a graduate of Al-Azhar University, without charge for nearly 2 months until July 2003 when he was charged by the State Security Prosecutor with "contempt of Islam." Following an investigation, the State Security Prosecutor then ordered Saleh released in late October 2003; however, the MOI continued to detain him under an administrative detention decree (the Emergency Law). After each of five separate rulings from the Supreme State Security Emergency Court ordering his release—the most recent of which occurred on June 30, 2005—the MOI renewed the detention order under the Emergency Law. Saleh remained in detention in Al-Wadi al-Gadid Prison, near Assiut. There were credible reports that state security officers harassed and threatened Saleh's wife and son.

In March 2004, a State Security Emergency Court found 26 persons, including 3 Britons, guilty of membership in an illegal subversive organization (the Islamic Liberation Party) and of obstructing the law and the Constitution. The defendants received sentences of 1 to 5 years. There were credible reports that defendants were tortured during the Government's investigation of the case.

Neither the Constitution nor the Civil and Penal Codes prohibit proselytizing, but police have harassed those accused of proselytizing on charges of ridiculing or insulting heavenly religions or inciting sectarian strife.

In April 2004, a woman who had converted from Coptic Christianity to Islam upon her marriage to a Muslim approached Andraus Mokhtar Maiz, a Coptic policeman in al-Minya, and told him that she wanted to convert back to Christianity. Maiz reportedly referred her to a bishop, only to learn soon thereafter that the woman had filed a case against him, accusing him of misusing his authority as a policeman and of bribing a Muslim to convert. SSIS then arrested Maiz in al-Minya, where he was reportedly held incommunicado for a week and beaten. Released after SSIS determined that there was no wrongdoing, Maiz was re-arrested in late June 2004, after the woman appealed to security officials. In July 2004, Maiz was charged with dereliction of duty and with bribing a Muslim to convert to Christianity. A military court sentenced him to a prison term of 1 year in the military prison in Minya Governorate, but Maiz was released in January and reinstated to his job.

While there are no legal restrictions on the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, there were occasional reports that police harassed Christians who converted from Islam.

The law prescribes administrative steps consequential to the conversion of a non-Muslim to Islam. The minor children of converts to Islam, and in some cases adult children, may automatically become classified as Muslims in the eyes of the Government irrespective of the religion of the other spouse. This practice is in accordance with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, which dictates "no jurisdiction of a non-Muslim over a Muslim."

In April 2004, an administrative court issued a verdict allowing Mona Makram Gibran, who had converted to Islam and later converted back to Christianity, to recover her original (Christian) name and identity. Some legal observers believed the case would constitute a significant precedent as the Government has generally refused to acknowledge citizens' conversions from Islam to Christianity. The court's written verdict noted ". . . the Constitution guarantees equality among citizens . . . without any discrimination based on race, sex, language, or faith. The Government also guarantees freedom of thought and religious faith in accordance with Article 46 of the Constitution. . . . [The State] is legally committed to register the woman's real religion and is not allowed under any circumstance to use its assigned powers to force the woman to remain Muslim." As of late June 2005, there were 49 other cases involving individuals who converted to Islam and then back to Christianity, who were attempting to recover their original Christian identities. All of these cases were before the same judge of the Cairo Administrative Court who ruled in the Gibran case. Of these 49 individuals, approximately 8 had received verdicts allowing them to recover their Christian identities. The MOI appealed two of these cases, perhaps because it did not foresee the flood of cases filed after the Gibran

decision. These two cases were before the Supreme Administrative Court at the end of the reporting period. It remained unclear whether these cases would set a broad precedent for the Government's treatment of converts from Islam.

Prior to the above mentioned cases, the Government had not recognized conversions of individuals originally Muslim to Christianity or other religions, and resistance to such conversions by local officials constituted a prohibition in practice. In the absence of a legal means to register their change in religious status, some converts resorted to soliciting illicit identity papers, often by submitting fraudulent supporting documents or bribing the government clerks who process the documents. In such cases, authorities periodically charged converts with violating laws prohibiting the falsification of documents.

Under Shari'a, as interpreted by the Government, a non-Muslim wife who converts to Islam must divorce her "apostate," non-Muslim husband. Upon the wife's conversion, local security authorities ask the non-Muslim husband if he is willing to convert to Islam; if he chooses not to, divorce proceedings begin immediately. Custody of children is then awarded to the mother, following her conversion to Islam and required divorce from her husband.

In April 2005, the Family Court granted the divorce of Wafaa Riffat Adly, a Christian woman who had converted to Islam, from her Christian husband Said Farouk Adly, after he refused to convert.

An estimated several thousand persons were imprisoned because of alleged support for or membership in Islamist groups seeking to overthrow the Government. The Government stated that these persons were in detention because of membership in or activities on behalf of violent extremist groups, without regard to their religious affiliation. Internal security services monitor groups and individuals suspected of involvement in or planning for extremist activity. Internal security agencies regularly detain such persons, and the state of emergency allows them to renew periods of administrative detention ad infinitum.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion carried out by the Government; however, there were again reports of forced conversions of Coptic women and girls to Islam by Muslim men. Reports of such cases are disputed and often include inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. Observers, including human rights groups, find it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involve a Coptic female who converts to Islam when she marries a Muslim male. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media.

Early on December 9, 2004, a three-way standoff at Cairo's Abbasiya Cathedral involving Christian protestors, orthodox church officials, and security forces ended with the return of Wafaa' Constantin, the wife of a Coptic Orthodox priest in the Nile Delta province of Beheira, to the protective custody and supervision of the Church following her apparent elopement with a Muslim man in late November. Church officials admitted in a December 10 press conference that Wafaa' had not been forced to convert to Islam against her will.

A 6-day sit-in by Coptic Christian protestors climaxed on the evening of December 8 when the crowd, which numbered several thousand, responded to continued delays in the return of Wafaa' to the Church by hurling rocks at riot police. Subsequent press reports indicated that at least 34 Christian demonstrators were arrested (although all were eventually released in late December and early January) and charged with disturbing the peace, assaulting police officers, and blocking traffic. Press reports also indicated that dozens of policemen and protestors were injured during the clashes and stone-throwing that marked the cathedral protests.

The exact course of events that led to the Constantin controversy remained unclear. Some commentators continued to insist that Constantin had been the victim of a forced conversion; others stated that the Government and the Coptic Church authorities had colluded in preventing Constantin from converting from Christianity to Islam. Constantin herself remained in seclusion in a church facility at the end of the period covered by this report.

There are reports in these cases of government authorities failing to uphold the law. Local authorities sometimes allow custody of a minor Christian female who "converts" to Islam to be transferred to a Muslim custodian, who is likely to grant approval for an underage marriage. Some Coptic activists maintain that government officials do not respond effectively to instances of alleged kidnapping. In cases of marriage between an underage Christian girl and a Muslim man, there have been credible reports that government authorities have failed to sufficiently cooperate with Christian families seeking to regain custody of their daughters.

In November 2004, Fadi Shamrouk, an epileptic 18-year old Coptic Christian student at the University of Alexandria, reportedly disappeared. When his family found him in police custody the next day, Fadi was then reportedly transferred to the control of Ahmed Muhammad Sayed El Batanoni, a former police lieutenant operating a law office in Alexandria. The family alleged that El Batanoni used extortion after they requested to see their son and were informed by police that Fadi had converted to Islam.

The family's church assisted in bringing a legal case that alleged that because he suffers from epilepsy, his abductors exploited his medical condition to convince him to convert to Islam. Fadi returned to his family in May, although the circumstances of this arrangement were unclear. On May 31, the court ruled that Fadi was not mentally ill, that he therefore had the right to convert, but that he had not yet done so.

In February, hundreds of Christians demonstrated in Fayoum, protesting what they viewed as the kidnapping and forced conversion of two young women to Islam. However, there were reliable reports indicating that the women went willingly to the security directorate to convert, after falling in love with Muslim men. The Ministry of Interior assisted in allowing religious consultation sessions between the women and Bishop Ebram (Bishop of Fayoum) to be held away from the security directorate, despite the fact that the regulations on conversion state that such sessions must be held in the security directorate. Bishop Ebram convinced the women to keep their faith.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who may have been abducted or illegally removed from the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government took several steps to encourage religious freedom and tolerance. Al-Azhar maintained a schedule of interfaith discussions inside the country and abroad. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Tantawi, a government appointee, and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda participated in joint public events.

In January 2004, the Government announced the formation of the NCHR, on which 5 of the 25 appointed members are Coptic Christians. The Council released its first report in March. Although the Council did not address religious freedom per se, it submitted numerous requests to the Ministry of Interior requesting action on complaints it had received regarding church repair and construction.

A prominent Coptic nongovernmental organization (NGO), the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), continued its program of interreligious dialogue in cooperation with the Ministry of Islamic Religious Endowments. The program encouraged interaction between young Muslim and Christian religious leaders and included a major conference on citizenship and education, as well as a series of workshops, training courses, and seminars throughout the reporting period.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to take steps to contain incidents of sectarian tension, most notably its handling of the Wafaa' Constantin case.

On Feb. 13, a court overruled the Government's previous decision to prevent the Word Center for Human Rights, an organization which often handles Coptic rights issues, from registering as an NGO. In 2003, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA) had rejected the Center's application for NGO status, citing "security objections" and contended that the Center is a group based on religion and therefore not eligible for NGO status. The Center registered as an NGO, and at the end of the reporting period the MSA's appeal was pending.

Government-owned television and radio continued to provide programming time devoted to Christian issues, including live broadcast of Christmas and Easter services. The state-owned Nile Culture Channel, available via satellite, broadcast weekly Orthodox Church services and other Christian programming. Additionally, local television channels offered an increasing number of documentaries on Coptic issues. Excerpts from Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda's weekly public addresses, documentaries on the country's monasteries, the travels of the Holy Family and other aspects of Christian history, and discussions among Muslims and Christians of local and international topics including discrimination appeared regularly in pro-government newspapers.

Christian clergy spoke on popular television programs such as "Good Morning Egypt" about current topics and Christian religious beliefs. A version of Sesame Street, specially designed for the country by the Children's Television Workshop, continued to gain broad viewership among young children and many of their parents since it was first broadcast in 2000. Among the aims of the program is the promotion of tolerance, and one of the principal characters is a Christian.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Egyptian Muslims and Christians share a common history and national identity. They also share the same ethnicity, race, culture, and language. Christians are geographically dispersed throughout the country, and Christians and Muslims live as neighbors. However, at times religious tensions flare up and individual acts of prejudice occur.

On December 5, 2004, in the Upper Egyptian village of Mankatien, Minya Governorate, a Muslim mob reportedly attacked a new Coptic church and damaged property belonging to Christians. Sources reported that a Christian-owned pharmacy and home were burned down, while the mob's attempt to burn down the church reportedly failed. In reaction to the incidents, police imposed a curfew and arrested 15 local Muslims, but some Christians alleged the police had been too slow to react. None of the victims received any compensation for the damages resulting from this incident.

On March 25, near Mankatien, a Muslim motorist allegedly ran over a group of Christian children who were walking home after attending Friday church classes. Nermeen Kamal Malak, an 8-year old girl, was killed; others received minor injuries. Christian villagers described the accident as deliberate. In response, many Christian villagers in Mankatien demonstrated, demanding an end to their 28-year wait for approval for a reconstruction permit.

The case of Ahmad and Ibrahim Nasir, who were sentenced to 7 years in prison for the 1999 murder of a monk in Assiut, remained pending at the end of the reporting period. In May 2004, the Court of Cassation sustained an appeal by the Public Prosecutor seeking a heavier sentence. The brothers received 15-year prison terms, twice the original sentence which they appealed.

According to the law, persons above the age of 16 may convert to Islam without parental consent. Ignorance of the law and social pressure, including the centrality of marriage to a woman's identity, often affect a girl's decision to convert. Family conflict and financial pressure also are cited as factors.

Official relations between Christian and Muslim religious figures are amicable and include reciprocal visits to religious celebrations. Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Awqaf engage in frequent public and private interfaith discussions with Christians of various denominations, both within the country and in other countries. NGOs such as CEOSS are active in organizing formal and informal interfaith events; during the period covered by this report, CEOSS held numerous events which brought together Christian and Muslim youth leaders to discuss issues such as citizenship, media affairs, and societal violence. Private Christian schools admit Muslim students, and religious charities serve both communities.

In articles in the independent press, prominent leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church criticized Mormons and Seventh-day Adventists.

In June 2004, the Ministry of Culture's Censorship Department formed a committee of cultural figures (both Muslim and Christian) to review a new film ("I Love the Cinema"/"Bahebb El-Cima"), which told the story of Egypt's Coptic Orthodox minority during the Nasser era. After initial screenings, Muslim and Christian lawyers filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor, seeking to have the film removed from distribution and the film producers tried for "contempt for religion" because of the film's frank references to problems in the Church. A Cairo court first rejected the case, referring it to a specialized court, which ruled against the plaintiffs in late November 2004. Audiences were able to see the film at a number of theaters for approximately 8 weeks during the year.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The subject of religious freedom is an important part of the bilateral dialogue. The subject has been raised with senior Egyptian government officials by all levels of the U.S. Government, including by the Secretary of State, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, the Ambassador, and other Embassy officials. The Embassy maintains formal contacts with the Office of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy also discusses religious freedom issues regularly in contacts with other government officials, including governors and Members of Parliament. The Ambassador has made public statements supporting interfaith understanding and efforts toward harmony and equality among citizens of all faiths. Specifically, the Embassy has raised its concerns about official discrimination against Baha'is with the Government.

The Embassy maintains an active dialogue with the leaders of the Christian and Muslim religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. The Embassy investigates every complaint of official religious discrimination brought to its attention. The Embassy also discusses religious freedom with a range of contacts,

including academics, businessmen, and citizens outside of the capital area. U.S. officials actively challenge anti-Semitic articles in the media through discussions with editors-in-chief and other journalists.

U.S. programs and activities support initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom, including funding for CEOSS programs that work with Coptic community groups in Upper Egypt.

The U.S. is working to strengthen civil society, supporting secular channels and the broadening of a civic culture that promote religious tolerance. The U.S. Embassy in Cairo supports projects that promote tolerance and mutual respect between members of different religious communities.

The Embassy supports the development of materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic-language and English-language curriculums.

The U.S. developed a version of the television program *Sesame Street* designed to reach remote households and which has as one of its goals the promotion of tolerance, including among different religions. According to a recent household survey, the program, begun in 2000, is reaching more than 90 percent of elementary school-aged children.

The Embassy is also working with the Supreme Council of Antiquities to promote the conservation of cultural antiquities, including Islamic, Christian, and Jewish historical sites.

IRAN

The Constitution declares the “official religion of Iran is Islam, and the doctrine followed is that of Ja’fari (Twelver) Shi’ism.” The Government restricts freedom of religion.

There was no substantive change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Members of the country’s religious minorities—including Sunni and Sufi Muslims, Baha’is, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians—reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. Government actions created a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities, especially Baha’is, Jews, and evangelical Christians.

The U.S. Government makes clear its objections to the Government’s treatment of religious minorities through public statements, support for relevant U.N. and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, as well as diplomatic initiatives among all states concerned about religious freedom in the country. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Iran as a “Country of Particular Concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act for its particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

In December 2003, the U.N. General Assembly passed Resolution 58/195 on the human rights situation in the country that expressed serious concern about the continued discrimination against religious minorities by the Government. In the fall of 2004, the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 631,660 square miles, and its population is an estimated 69 million. The population is approximately 97 percent Muslim, of which an estimated 89 percent are Shi’a and 8 percent are Sunni, mostly Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest. Sufi Brotherhoods are popular, but there are no reliable figures available regarding the size of the Sufi population.

According to the country’s most recent official national census, taken in 1996, there were an estimated 59.8 million Muslims, 30,000 Zoroastrians, 79,000 Christians, and 13,000 Jews, with 28,000 “others” and 47,000 “not stated.”

Baha’is, Jews, Christians, Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians constitute less than 1 percent of the population combined. The largest non-Muslim minority is the Baha’i community, which has an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 adherents throughout the country. Credible estimates on the size of the Jewish community vary from 20,000 to 30,000. This figure represents a substantial reduction from the estimated 75,000 to 80,000 Jews who resided in the country prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution. According to U.N. figures, there are approximately 300,000 Christians, the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians. Unofficial estimates indicate an Assyrian Christian population of approximately 10,000. There also are Protestant denominations, in-

cluding evangelical churches. The U.N. Special Representative reported that Christians are emigrating at an estimated rate of 15,000 to 20,000 per year. The Mandaeans, a community whose religion draws on pre-Christian gnostic beliefs, number approximately 5,000 to 10,000 persons, with members residing primarily in Khuzestan in the southwest.

The Government estimates the Zoroastrian community at approximately 30,000 to 35,000 adherents; however, Zoroastrian groups cite an estimated 60,000 adherents. Zoroastrians mainly are ethnic Persians concentrated in the cities of Tehran, Kerman, and Yazd. Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire and thus played a central role in the country's history.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The Constitution declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." All laws and regulations must be consistent with the official interpretation of the Shari'a (Islamic law). The Constitution states that "within the limits of the law," Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities who are guaranteed freedom to practice their religion; however, members of these recognized minority religious groups have reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs. Adherents of religions not recognized by the Constitution do not enjoy freedom to practice their beliefs. This restriction seriously affects adherents of the Baha'i Faith, which the Government regards as a heretical Islamic group with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the country's Islamic revolution. However, Baha'is view themselves not as Muslims, but as an independent religion with origins in the Shi'a Islamic tradition. Government officials have stated that, as individuals, all Baha'is are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under the articles of the Constitution as citizens; however, the Government has continued to prohibit Baha'is from teaching and practicing their faith.

The tricameral government structure is ruled over by a supreme religious jurisconsult, or "Supreme Leader." This Supreme Leader, chosen by a group of 83 Islamic scholars, oversees the State's decision-making process. All acts of the Majlis (legislative body or parliament) must be reviewed for conformity with Islamic law and the Constitution by the Council of Guardians, which is composed of six clerics appointed by the Supreme Leader, as well as six Muslim jurists (legal scholars) nominated by the Head of the Judiciary and approved by the Majlis.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance (Ershad) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) monitor religious activity closely. Adherents of recognized religious minorities are not required to register individually with the Government; however, their communal, religious, and cultural events and organizations, including schools, are monitored closely. Registration of Baha'is is a police function. The Government has pressured evangelical Christian groups to compile and submit membership lists for their congregations, but evangelicals have resisted this demand. Non-Muslim owners of grocery shops are required to indicate their religious affiliation on the fronts of their shops.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

By law and practice, religious minorities are not allowed to be elected to a representative body or to hold senior government or military positions; however, 5 of a total 270 seats in the Majlis are reserved for religious minorities. Three of these seats are reserved for members of the Christian faith, two seats for the country's Armenian Christians, and one for Assyrians and Chaldeans. There is also one seat for a member of the Jewish faith, and one for a member of the Zoroastrian faith. While members of the Sunni Muslim minority do not have reserved seats in the Majlis, they are allowed to serve in the body. Members of religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims, are allowed to vote. All of Iran's minority religions, including Sunni Muslims, are barred from being elected President.

All religious minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing. The Government does not protect the right of citizens to change or renounce their religious faith. Apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, may be punishable by death; however, there were no reported cases of the death penalty being applied for apostasy during the reporting period.

Members of religious minorities, excluding Sunni Muslims, are prevented from serving in the judiciary and security services and from becoming public school principals. Applicants for public sector employment are screened for their adherence to

and knowledge of Islam. Government workers who do not observe Islam's principles and rules are subject to penalties. The Constitution states that the country's army must be Islamic and must recruit individuals who are committed to the objectives of the Islamic revolution; however, in practice no religious minorities are exempt from military service.

University applicants are required to pass an examination in Islamic theology, which limits the access of most religious minorities to higher education, although all public school students, including non-Muslims, must study Islam. The Government generally allows recognized religious minorities to conduct religious education for their adherents. This includes separate and privately funded Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian schools; however, Baha'i schools are not allowed. The Ministry of Education, which imposes certain curriculum requirements, supervises these schools. With few exceptions, the directors of such private schools must be Muslim. Attendance at the schools is not mandatory for recognized religious minorities. The Ministry of Education must approve all textbooks used in coursework, including religious texts. Recognized religious minorities may provide religious instruction in non-Persian languages, but such texts require approval by the authorities. This approval requirement sometimes imposes significant translation expenses on minority communities.

The legal system discriminates against religious minorities, who receive lower awards than Muslims in injury and death lawsuits and incur heavier punishments. In January 2005, the Expediency Council approved appending a Note to Article 297 of the 1991 Islamic Punishments Act, authorizing collection of equal "blood money" (*diyeh*) for the death of Muslims and non-Muslims. All women and Baha'i men were excluded from the equalization provisions of the bill. According to law, Baha'i blood is considered "Mobah," meaning it can be spilled with impunity.

Sunni Muslims are the largest religious minority in the country, claiming a membership of approximately five and a half million (8 percent of the population), consisting mostly of Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest. The Constitution provides Sunni Muslims a large degree of religious freedom, although it forbids a Sunni Muslim from becoming President. Sunnis claim that the Government discriminates against them; however, it is difficult to distinguish whether the cause for discrimination is religious or ethnic since most Sunnis are also members of ethnic minorities. Sunnis cite the lack of a Sunni mosque in Tehran, despite the presence of over 1 million adherents there, as a prominent example of this discrimination. Sunnis also have cited the lack of Sunni representation in appointed offices in provinces where they form a majority, such as Kurdistan province, as well as their reported inability to obtain senior governmental positions. In addition, Sunnis have charged that the state broadcasting company, Voice and Vision, airs programming insulting to them.

In April 2004, Sunni Majlis representatives sent a letter to Supreme Leader Khamene'i decrying the lack of Sunni presence in the executive and judiciary branches of government, especially in higher-ranking positions in embassies, universities, and other institutions. They called on Khamene'i to issue a decree halting anti-Sunni propaganda in the mass media, books, and publications; the measure would include the state-run media. The Sunni representatives also requested adherence to the constitutional articles ensuring equal treatment of all ethnic groups.

The Baha'i Faith originated in the country during the 1840s as a reformist movement within Shi'a Islam. The Government considers Baha'is to be apostates because of their claim to a valid religious revelation subsequent to that of Muhammed, despite the fact that Baha'is do not consider themselves to be Muslim. Additionally, the Baha'i Faith is defined by the Government as a political "sect," linked to the Pahlavi regime and hence counterrevolutionary. A 2001 Ministry of Justice report stated in part that Baha'is would be permitted to enroll in schools only if they did not identify themselves as Baha'is, and that Baha'is preferably should be enrolled in schools with a strong and imposing religious ideology. The report also stated that Baha'is must be excluded or expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once their identity becomes known.

Baha'is may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with co-religionists abroad. The fact that the Baha'i world headquarters (established by the founder of the Baha'i Faith in the 19th century, in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine) is situated in what is now the state of Israel exposes Baha'is to government charges of "espionage on behalf of Zionism." These charges were more acute when Baha'is were caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Baha'i headquarters.

Baha'is were banned from government employment. In addition, Baha'is were regularly denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization.

The Government allows recognized religious minorities to establish community centers and certain self-financed cultural, social, athletic, or charitable associations. However, the Government prohibits the Baha'i community from official assembly and from maintaining administrative institutions by actively closing such Baha'i institutions. Since the Baha'i Faith has no clergy, the denial of the right to form such institutions and elect officers threatens its existence in the country.

Broad restrictions on Baha'is undermine their ability to function as a community. Baha'is repeatedly have been offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith.

Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, and other assets were seized shortly after the 1979 Revolution. No properties have been returned, and many have been destroyed. Baha'is were not allowed to bury and honor their dead in keeping with their religious tradition. Baha'i graveyards in Yazd and other cities have been desecrated, and the Government did not seek to identify or punish the perpetrators. Public and private universities continue to deny admittance to Baha'i students. In July 2004, for the first time, Baha'i applicants were permitted to take part in the nationwide exam for entrance into state-run universities. However, for those students who passed the exam, "Islam" was pre-printed as a prospective student's religious affiliation on the form authorizing their matriculation. This action precluded Baha'i enrollment in the country's state-run universities since a tenet of Baha'ism is to not deny one's faith.

In principle, but with some exceptions, there is little restriction of or interference with Jewish religious practice; however, education of Jewish children has become more difficult in recent years. The Government reportedly allows Hebrew instruction, recognizing that it is necessary for Jewish religious practice. However, it strongly discourages the distribution of Hebrew texts, in practice making it difficult to teach the language. Moreover, the Government has required that in conformity with the schedule of other schools, several Jewish schools must remain open on Saturdays, which violates Jewish law.

Jewish citizens are permitted to obtain passports and to travel outside the country, but they often are denied the multiple-exit permits normally issued to other citizens. With the exception of certain business travelers, the authorities require Jews to obtain clearance and pay additional fees before each trip abroad. The Government appears concerned about the emigration of Jewish citizens and permission generally is not granted for all members of a Jewish family to travel outside the country at the same time.

According to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) background paper on the country, the Mandaean are regarded as Christians and are included among the country's three recognized religious minorities. However, Mandaeans regard themselves not as Christians but as adherents of a religion that predates Christianity in both belief and practice. Mandaeans enjoyed official support as a distinct religion prior to the Revolution, but their legal status as a religion since then has been the subject of debate in the Majlis and has not been clarified. The small community faces discrimination similar to that faced by the country's other religious minorities. There were reports that members of the Mandaean community experienced societal discrimination and pressure to convert to Islam, and they often are denied access to higher education. Mandaean refugees have reported specific religious freedom violations and concerns, such as being forced to observe Islamic fasting rituals and to pray in Islamic fashion, both in direct violation of Mandaean teaching.

Sufi organizations outside the country remain concerned about government repression of Sufi religious practices, including the constant harassment and intimidation of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services.

The Government propagates an interpretation of Islam that effectively deprives women of some rights granted to men. Gender segregation is enforced generally throughout the country without regard to religious affiliation and can be burdensome for those who do not follow strict Islamic religious codes; however, as a practical matter these prohibitions have loosened in recent years. Women must ride in a reserved section on public buses and enter public buildings, universities, and airports through separate entrances. Violators of these restrictions face punishments such as flogging or monetary fines. Women are prohibited from attending male sporting events, although this restriction does not appear to be enforced universally. Women are not free to choose what they wear in public, although enforcement of rules for conservative Islamic dress has eased in recent years. Women are subject to harassment by the authorities if their dress or behavior is considered inappropriate and are sentenced to flogging or imprisonment for such violations. Showing pictures of women in the media, including foreign women, who are not dressed in accordance with conservative Islamic dress norms, is prohibited by law. There are

penalties, including flogging and monetary fines, for failure to observe norms of Islamic dress at work

Legally, the testimony of a woman is worth only half that of a man in court. A married woman must obtain the written consent of her husband before she may travel outside the country. The law provides for stoning for adultery; however, in 2002 the Government suspended this practice.

Although a male can marry at age 15 and above without parental consent, the 1991 Civil Law states that a virgin female, even over 18 years of age, needs the consent of her father or grandfather to wed, unless she is willing to go to court to get a ruling allowing her to marry without this consent.

Women have the right to divorce, and regulations promulgated in 1984 substantially broadened the grounds on which a woman may seek a divorce. However, a husband is not required to cite a reason for divorcing his wife. In 1986 the Government issued a 12-point "contract" to serve as a model for marriage and divorce, which limits the privileges accorded to men by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law. The model contract also recognized a divorced woman's right to a share in the property that couples acquire during their marriage and to increased alimony rights. Women who remarry are forced to give up custody of children from earlier marriages to the child's father. The law allows for the granting of custody of minor children to the mother in certain divorce cases in which the father is proven unfit to care for the child.

Many female Muslims are seeking to eliminate laws and practices that discriminate against women, arguing that relegating women to a lesser status due to, inter alia, their being considered "deficient in reason" is not a precept of Islam, but rather a non-Islamic accretion to Islamic practices.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The property rights of Baha'is are generally disregarded, and they suffer frequent government harassment and persecution. Since 1979 the Government has confiscated large numbers of private and business properties belonging to Baha'is.

Numerous Baha'i homes reportedly have been seized and handed over to an agency of Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Sources indicate that property was confiscated in Rafsanjan, Kerman, Marv-Dasht, and Yazd. Several Baha'i farmers in the southern part of the country were arrested, and one who was jailed for several days was only freed after paying a fine. Authorities reportedly also confiscated Baha'i properties in Kata, forced several families to leave their homes and farmlands, imprisoned some farmers, and did not permit others to harvest their crops. In one instance, a Baha'i woman from Isfahan, who legally traveled abroad, returned to find that her home had been confiscated. The Government also has seized private homes in which Baha'i youth classes were held despite the owners having proper ownership documents. The Baha'i community claims the Government's seizure of Baha'i personal property and its denial of Baha'i access to education and employment are eroding the economic base of the community.

The Government harassed the Baha'i community by arbitrarily arresting Baha'is, charging them with violating Islamic penal code Articles 500 and 698, relating to activities against the State and spreading falsehood, respectively. Often, the charges were not dropped upon release and those with charges still pending against them reportedly feared rearrest at any time.

In February 2004, authorities initiated the destruction of the tomb of Quddus, a Baha'i holy site. Local Baha'is attempted to prevent the destruction through legal channels, but the tomb was destroyed in the interim. The Baha'is were not allowed permission to enter the site and retrieve the remains of this revered Baha'i figure. In June 2004, the house of Mizra Buzarg-e-Nuri, father of the faith's founder, was destroyed without notice. The house was confiscated before by the Government and was of great religious significance because the founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah, had lived there.

According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, since 1979 more than 200 Baha'is have been killed, 15 have disappeared and are presumed dead, and more than 10,000 Baha'is have been dismissed from government and university jobs. The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs.

In July 2004, a Baha'i optician in Hamadan was reportedly kidnapped and brutally attacked by five individuals, who threatened him with death if he did not recant his faith and convert to Islam. Local authorities were unwilling to pursue the case and a local judicial official told him "it would cost him dearly" if he chose to pursue his complaint against the assailants.

In November 2004, for the first time, the Baha'i community wrote an open letter to the government of the Islamic Republic, addressed to President Khatami, seeking

an end to Baha'i-focused human rights and religious freedom abuses. Numerous anecdotal reports indicated a marked increase in government persecution of Baha'is after this letter. Much of this anti-Baha'i activity focused on Yazd, presumably due to Yazdi Baha'is having presented Yazd intelligence-security officials with a copy of the letter.

In December 2004 and January 2005, nine Baha'is in Yazd were arrested and briefly detained, with their homes searched and some possessions confiscated. On January 14, authorities summoned, questioned, and released another Yazd Baha'i, and four days later on January 18, four individuals came to his home and beat him with batons, inflicting severe injuries to his face, back, and arms. The same individuals, equipped with batons and communication devices, also attacked the home of another Baha'i later that day. On that same day, these same persons went to the home of a third Baha'i and attacked him with batons, causing serious head wounds. This third Baha'i was attacked again on January 25; on January 27 his shop was set on fire.

On February 2 and 3, the Baha'i cemetery in Yazd was destroyed, with cars driven over the graves, tombstones smashed, and the remains of the interred left exposed. Two days later, a gravestone was removed and left in front of a Baha'i's home, along with a threatening letter. The Baha'i community filed a complaint with authorities at the national level, but no action was taken. These events coincided with the launch of a campaign of defamation against the Baha'i Faith in government-controlled media.

In February, two Baha'is were released from prison after serving almost 15 years on charges related to their religious beliefs.

In March, a series of Baha'i arrests and imprisonments began throughout the country. In Tehran on March 6, intelligence officials arrested and took into custody three prominent Baha'is, and another was arrested and imprisoned on March 16. Agents conducted prolonged searches of their homes and confiscated documents, books, and other belongings. They were all detained without charge, and released after having posted bail.

On March 8, one of the Baha'is previously arrested and briefly detained (for having distributed the open letter from the Baha'i community to President Khatami), received a three-year sentence and was incarcerated in Evin prison. Another Baha'i previously arrested and detained, was tried in absentia and given a one-year sentence for the same alleged offence. Neither of these men had access to lawyers nor to any form of legal counsel.

On April 25, five more Baha'is were arrested and imprisoned, all members of farming families whose properties had been confiscated in the village of Kata, when they obeyed a summons and came to the court for hearings concerning their grievances. On May 3, four more Baha'is from Kata answered a similar summons and appeared before a court in the same province. The judge asked them if they would relinquish their property, and the four Baha'is responded that they would not do so because the homes and land had belonged to their forefathers. The judge ordered their arrest and detention. Legal action was taken on their behalf, and on May 30, all nine farmers were released from prison after a business license had been used as collateral.

On May 16, eight Baha'is were summoned to appear before the office of the Public Prosecutor in the city of Semnan, and the next day another Baha'i in that city received a similar summons. They were charged with "creating anxiety in the minds of the public and those of the Iranian officials" and distributing "propaganda against the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran" for having distributed copies of the November 2004 open letter to various Iranian officials. When they arrived at the Prosecutor's office on May 18, they were asked to post bail for their release. Concerned that this could lead to further arrests and bail demands affecting other Baha'is, they declined to do so. They were detained and subsequently freed on May 20 2005, with the understanding that they would appear for a hearing at a later date.

In total, between March and June approximately 35 Baha'is were arrested, charged, and released pending trial, with the charges typically being "causing anxiety in the minds of the public and of officials," and "spreading propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran." By the end of the reporting period, Mehran Kawsari and Zabihullah Mahrami, the latter of whom was arrested in 1995 and convicted of apostasy in 1996 because of his adherence to the Baha'i Faith, were the only two Baha'is remaining in jail due to charges relating to their beliefs. Mahrami continued to serve his life sentence, which was commuted from a death sentence by President Khatami in 1999. There were also 36 Baha'is released on bail and awaiting trial.

The Government vigilantly enforces its prohibition on proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians by closing their churches and arresting Christian converts.

Members of evangelical congregations have been required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Worshipers are subject to identity checks by authorities posted outside congregation centers. The Government has restricted meetings for evangelical services to Sundays, and church officials have been ordered to inform the Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance before admitting new members to their congregations.

Conversion of a Muslim to a non-Muslim religion is considered apostasy under the law and is punishable by the death penalty, although it is unclear whether this punishment has been enforced in recent years. Similarly, non-Muslims may not proselytize Muslims without putting their own lives at risk. Evangelical church leaders are subject to pressure from authorities to sign pledges that they will not evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services.

In previous years, the Government harassed churchgoers in Tehran, in particular worshippers of the capital's Assembly of God congregation. This harassment has included conspicuous monitoring outside Christian premises by Revolutionary Guards to discourage Muslims or converts from entering church premises, as well as demands for the presentation of the identity papers of worshippers inside. In May 2004, there were reports of the arrest of several dozen evangelical Christians in the north, including a Christian pastor, his wife, and their two teenage children in Chalous, in Mazandaran Province. Many of those arrested were released later in May, and the pastor and his family were released in July, after six weeks in detention. One press source reported that authorities ordered those jailed to stop meeting for worship and to "stop talking about Jesus."

On September 9 2004, security officials raided the annual general conference of the country's Assemblies of God Church, arresting approximately 85 religious leaders gathered at the church's denominational center in Karaj. After fingerprinting and questioning, authorities released all but 10 pastors later that day. Of these, nine were released on September 12. Assemblies of God Pastor Hamid Pourmand, a former Muslim of Assyrian Christian background who converted to Christianity nearly 25 years ago and who led a congregation in Bushehr, was the only detainee not released. In November 2004, Pourmand, who was also a non-commissioned officer in the Army, was moved to a military prison. In late January 2005 he was tried in a military court on charges of espionage. On February 16 he was found guilty of espionage and sentenced to 3 years, and was transferred to Evin Prison to serve his sentence. A military appeals court subsequently affirmed the verdict and the sentence. As a consequence, Pourmand faced automatic discharge from the army and forfeit of his entire income, pension, and housing for his family. In mid-April, Iranian authorities abandoned preliminary hearings against Pourmand before a Tehran General and Revolutionary Court on two separate charges of apostasy and proselytizing, both capital crimes, reportedly after news of his trial leaked out to the international press. In early May, he was transferred from Tehran to his home city of Bushehr to stand trial in a General and Revolutionary Court on these charges. On May 28, that court acquitted Pourmand on apostasy and proselytizing charges, and he was sent back to Tehran's Evin Prison to serve out the remainder of his 3-year prison sentence.

In 2000, 10 of 13 Jews arrested in 1999 were convicted on charges of illegal contact with Israel, conspiracy to form an illegal organization, and recruiting agents. Along with 2 Muslim defendants, the 10 Jews received prison sentences ranging from 4 to 13 years. An appeals court subsequently overturned the convictions for forming an illegal organization and recruiting agents, but it upheld the convictions for illegal contacts with Israel with reduced sentences. One of the 10 was released in February 2001 and another in January 2002, both upon completion of their prison terms. Three additional prisoners were released before the end of their sentences in October 2002. In April 2003, it was announced that the last five were to be released. It is not clear if the eight who were released before the completion of their sentences were fully pardoned or were released provisionally. During and shortly after the trial, Jewish-owned businesses in Tehran and Shiraz were targets of vandalism and boycotts, and Jews reportedly suffered personal harassment and intimidation. There were no reports of vandalism or similar harassment during the reporting period.

Numerous Sunni clerics have been killed in recent years, some allegedly by government agents. While the exact reason for their murders is unknown, most Sunni Muslims in the country belong to ethnic minorities who historically have suffered abuse by the central government.

There were no reports of government harassment of the Zoroastrian community during the reporting period; however, the community remains unable to convene a Spiritual Assembly to manage its religious affairs for fear of official retaliation, and there were reports of discrimination in employment and education. In June 2004,

Zoroastrians were able to make, apparently without government interference, their annual pilgrimage to one of the holiest sites of their faith, the temple of Chak-Chak (near the city of Yazd).

The Government carefully monitors the statements and views of the country's senior Shi'a religious leaders. Several Shi'a religious leaders have been under house arrest for years, including Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was released after 5 years of house arrest in January 2003.

The Special Clerical Court (SCC) system, established in 1987 to investigate offenses and crimes committed by clerics and which the Supreme Leader oversees directly, is not provided for in the Constitution and operates outside the domain of the judiciary. In particular, critics alleged that the clerical courts were used to prosecute certain clerics for expressing controversial ideas and for participating in activities outside the area of religion, including journalism.

On February 6, the special clerical court agreed to the conditional release (parole) of prominent dissident cleric Hojatolislam Hassan Yussefi Eshkevari; he had served two thirds of his 7-year sentence and was therefore eligible for parole under the law. The cleric had been arrested in 2000, charged with the capital crimes of apostasy and "corruption on earth," in conjunction with speeches he had made in a 2000 conference on reform in Berlin.

Laws based on religion have been used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines have been closed, and leading publishers and journalists were imprisoned on vague charges of "insulting Islam" or "calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic." In 2002, academic Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammed, based on a speech in which he challenged Muslims not to blindly follow the clergy, provoking an international and domestic outcry. In February 2003, his death sentence was revoked by the Supreme Court, but the case was sent back to the lower court for retrial. He was retried in July 2003 on charges that did not include apostasy and was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment, 2 of which were suspended, and 5 years of additional "deprivation of social right" (meaning that he could not teach or write books or articles). His time served was counted towards his 3-year sentence; the court converted the remainder of the time to a fine.

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.

However, a child born to a Muslim father automatically is considered a Muslim. Also, Baha'is were repeatedly offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The continuous presence of the country's pre-Islamic, non-Muslim communities, such as Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, has accustomed the population to the participation of non-Muslims in society; however, government actions continued to create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities.

While Jews are a recognized religious minority, allegations of official discrimination are frequent. The Government's anti-Israel policies, along with a perception among radical Muslims that all Jewish citizens support Zionism and the state of Israel, create a hostile atmosphere for the small community. For example, during the reporting period, many newspapers celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the anti-Semitic publication "Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Jewish leaders reportedly are reluctant to draw attention to official mistreatment of their community due to fear of government reprisal.

The Jewish community has been reduced to less than one-half of its prerevolutionary size. Some of this emigration is connected with the larger, general waves of departures following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, but some also stems from continued anti-Semitism on the part of the Government and within society.

In December 2004, the country's Sahar 1 TV station began airing a weekly series titled "For You, Palestine," or "Zahra's Blue Eyes," set in Israel and the West Bank. Produced in Farsi and subsequently translated into Arabic, this series depicted Israeli government, military, and civilian personnel harvesting organs from Palestinian children for the benefit of Israeli officials. Other anti-Semitic series shown

on state-run Iranian television during this period included “The People of the Cave,” a supposedly historical drama series, and “Al-Shatat.” “Al-Shatat,” originally broadcasted by Hizbullah’s Al-Manar TV channel, portrayed the Jewish people as being responsible for most the world’s problems, via their conspiring to achieve political and economic domination over the world.

In April, Ayatollah Hossein Nouri-Hamedani, one of the country’s leading religious authorities, told a group of clerics that “one should fight the Jews and vanquish them,” to prepare the ground and to hasten the advent of the Hidden Imam.

On April 13, Representative Maurice Motamed, who represents Jews in the Majlis, complained that Iran’s state television was broadcasting anti-Semitic programs. According to the press, Motamed claimed that “insulting Jews and attributing false things to them in television serials over the past 12 years has not only hurt the feelings of the Jewish community but has also led to the emigration of a considerable percentage of the Jewish community.” Motamed also claimed that repeated complaints about this problem have not had the desired effect.

The Government’s anti-Israel policies and the trial of 13 Jews in 2000, along with the perception among some of the country’s radicalized elements that Jews support Zionism and the state of Israel, created a threatening atmosphere for the Jewish community (see Section II). Many Jews have sought to limit their contact with or support for the state of Israel out of fear of reprisal. Recent anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations have included the denunciation of Jews themselves as opposed to the past practice of denouncing only “Israel” and “Zionism,” adding to the threatening atmosphere for the community.

Sunni Muslims encounter religious discrimination at the local, provincial, and national levels, and there were reports of discrimination against practitioners of the Sufi tradition during the reporting period. Sufis were also targeted by the country’s intelligence and security services.

In June 2003, an interfaith delegation of American Christians, Jews, and Muslims traveled to meet with religious, political, and cultural leaders. In April 2005, an interfaith delegation of Muslims, Christians, and Jews paid a return visit to the United States, attending an interfaith conference in Washington, D.C.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States has no diplomatic relations with the country, and thus it cannot raise directly the restrictions that the Government places on religious freedom and other abuses the Government commits against adherents of minority religions. The U.S. Government makes its position clear in public statements and reports, support for relevant U.N. and NGO efforts, and diplomatic initiatives to press for an end to government abuses.

From 1982 to 2001, the U.S. Government co-sponsored a resolution each year regarding the human rights situation in the country offered by the European Union at the annual meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). It passed every year until 2002, when the United States did not have a seat on the Commission, and the resolution failed passage by one vote. The U.S. supported a similar resolution offered each year during the U.N. General Assembly until the fall of 2002, when no resolution was tabled. The U.S. Government strongly supported the work of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Iran and called on the Government to grant him admission and allow him to conduct his research during the period of his mandate, which expired with the defeat of the resolution at the UNCHR in 2002. There also was no resolution on the country at the UNCHR in the spring of 2003. In 2003 the Canadian Government introduced a resolution censuring the country’s human rights policies, which was passed by the U.N. General Assembly. The U.S. remains supportive of efforts to raise the human rights situation whenever appropriate within international organizations.

On numerous occasions, the U.S. State Department spokesman has addressed the situation of the Baha’i and Jewish communities in the country. The U.S. Government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements and has urged them to raise the issue of religious freedom in discussions with the Government.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Iran as a “Country of Particular Concern” under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

IRAQ

Coalition-led forces overthrew the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein in April 2003. As recognized in U.N. Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1483, 1511, and 1546, an Interim Administration—the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)—administered the country until the establishment of an internationally recognized, representative government. The Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), recognized by UNSCR 1500 as the principal body of the Iraqi interim administration during the period of the CPA, adopted the Law for the Administration of the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period—the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL)—in March 2004. The new Iraqi Interim Government (IIG), consistent with UNSCR 1546, assumed full governmental authority in June 2004. In January, the country held its first free election, choosing a Transitional National Assembly, which appointed the Transitional Government in May.

The TAL established a republican, federal, democratic, and pluralistic system with powers shared among the federal and regional governments, including 18 governorates, as well as municipalities and local administrations. The TAL provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Article 7 of the TAL recognizes Islam as the official religion of the state and mandates that it be considered a source of legislation.

Despite the ongoing insurgency and the Government's focus on rebuilding the country's infrastructure, there were improvements in respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. For decades, the former regime conducted a brutal campaign of killing, summary execution, and protracted arbitrary arrest against the religious leaders and followers of the majority Shi'a Muslim population and sought to undermine the identity of minority non-Muslim groups. Since the 2003 liberation, the Government has not engaged in the persecution of any religious group, calling instead for tolerance and acceptance of all religious minorities.

While the Government respected the right of the individual to worship according to conscience, conservative and extremist Islamic elements continued to exert tremendous pressure on other groups to conform to radical interpretations of Islam's precepts. Although this impacted the secular population, Sunni and Shi'a alike, non-Muslims were especially vulnerable to the pressure of violence and terror attacks because of their minority status and lack of a tribal structure, which often affords a layer of protection.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Senior U.S. Administration and Embassy officials called for unity in the face of sectarian violence, supported the inclusion of religious minorities in the political and constitution drafting processes, and facilitated interfaith discussion with all members of the country's diverse religious communities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 437,072 square miles, and its population is approximately 26 million. An estimated 97 percent of the population is Muslim. Shi'a Muslims—predominantly Arab, but also including Turkmen, Faily Kurds, and other groups—constitute a 60 to 65 percent majority. Sunni Muslims make up 32 to 37 percent, of the population of whom approximately 18 to 20 percent are Sunni Kurds, 12 to 16 percent Sunni Arabs, and the remainder Sunni Turkmen. The remaining 3 percent comprises Chaldean (an eastern rite of the Catholic Church), Assyrian (Church of the East), Syriac (Eastern Orthodox), Armenian (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox), and Protestant Christians, as well as Yazidi, Sabeen (Mandaean), Baha'i, Kaka'i, and a small number of Jewish believers. Shi'a, although predominantly located in the south, are also a majority in Baghdad and have communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis form the majority in the center and the north of the country. Shi'a and Sunni Arabs are not ethnically distinct.

According to official estimates, the number of Christians decreased from 1.4 million in 1987 to fewer than 1 million. The majority of Christians are Catholic. Christian leaders estimate that approximately 700,000 Iraqi Christians live abroad.

Church leaders in Erbil and Mosul say Christians in the north account for roughly 30 percent of the country's Christian population. Four of the five largest Christian communities are located in Mosul (150,000), Erbil (20,000 to 25,000), Dohuk (13,000), and Kirkuk (12,000). According to the Primate of the Armenian Diocese, approximately 20,000 Armenian Christians remain in the country. An estimated 12,000 reside in Baghdad, and the remainder in Mosul, Basrah, Kirkuk, and the north. There are approximately 225,000 Assyrian Christians and an estimated 750,000 Chaldeans. Chaldean and Assyrian Christians, who are descendants of

some of the earliest Christian communities, have the same ethnic and linguistic background but are considered by some to be distinct ethnic groups. The communities speak a distinct language (Syriac). Although the former regime classified them as Arabs, both the Chaldo-Assyrians and the Government now consider this group as an ethnicity distinct from Arabs and Kurds; however, there are some Chaldeans and Assyrians who consider themselves Arab. Chaldeans (Eastern Rite Catholics) recognize the primacy of the Roman Catholic Pope, while the Assyrians, who are not Catholic, do not.

The Yazidi are a syncretistic religious group, or a set of several groups, with ancient origins and comprising elements of Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Gnostic beliefs and traditions. Yazidi do not intermarry with outsiders or accept converts. Defined by the former regime as Arabs, many Yazidi now consider themselves to be Kurds, while others define themselves as both religiously and ethnically distinct from Muslim Kurds. Most of the 700,000 Yazidi reside in the North.

Sabeian is an ancient religion dating from the first 3 centuries C.E. and reflects numerous religious influences, including ancient Gnostic, Jewish, and Christian beliefs. The Sabeian community continues to decline; according to Sabeian leaders, fewer than 20,000 remain in the country. While some Sabeians fled the tyranny of the former regime, this decline could also be attributed to the fact that converts are not accepted, and those Sabeians who marry Christians or Muslims are no longer regarded as Sabeian.

The Kaka'i, sometimes referred to as Ahl-e-Haqq, reside primarily in Kirkuk, Mosul, and Kankeen in Diyala Province. Primarily Shi'a Kurds, followers believe in the teachings of Imam Ali Bin Talib. Most are of Kurdish ethnicity.

While there are both Muslims and non-Muslims who are of secular orientation, there tends to be a distinct correlation between religious differences and ethnic or political differences. Political parties tend to be organized along religious or ethnic lines. For example, Shi'a Islamist parties, such as the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and Da'wa, as well as some Kurdish nationalist parties, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), are predominant political forces. Other political players include the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party and other ethnic minority parties, such as the Assyrian Democratic Movement and the Liberal Faili Kurds Organization.

There was no data available on active participation in religious services or rituals; however, terrorist attacks rendered unusable many mosques, churches, and holy sites. Additionally, many worshippers reportedly did not attend religious services or participate in religious events because of the threat of violence. For example, the most important Yazidi ritual, the annual 6-day pilgrimage to the tomb of Sheikh Adii in Lalish, still took place; however, many Yazidi preferred to remain in local houses of worship to celebrate this event due to security concerns. There were numerous reports of places of worship closing due to those fears.

The Government provided significant support for the Hajj, which is the annual 10-day pilgrimage to Mecca during the beginning of the Islamic month of Thi-Alhejja. The Sunni and Shi'a Waqfs, or religious endowments, accepted applications from the public and submitted them to the Supreme Council for the Hajj. This Council approved the list of approximately 27,000 names and covered approximately 50 percent of the pilgrims' expenses.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The TAL provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The TAL recognizes the Islamic identity of the majority of the citizenry and guarantees the full rights of all individuals to freedom of religious belief and practice. Specifically, article 13(F) of the TAL recognizes every citizen's right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief and practice, prohibiting coercion in such matters.

It is the Government's policy to protect the rights of all religious groups to gather and worship freely; however, in practice, the ongoing insurgency impeded the ability of many citizens to worship freely. Additionally, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) were not yet operating at full capability and were unable either to prevent or remedy effectively violations of these rights.

Article 7 of the TAL recognizes Islam as the official religion of the state and mandates that it be considered a source of legislation. According to this article, during the transitional period no law may be enacted that contradicts the universally agreed tenets of Islam, the principles of democracy, or the rights enumerated in Chapter 2 of the TAL, which include the right to freedom of thought, conscience,

and religious belief and practice, as well as a guarantee of equality before the law without regard to gender, sect, opinion, belief, nationality, religion, or origin.

Many Muslim holy days are also national holidays, including, Ashura, Arba'īn, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and the Birth of the Prophet. Although some non-Muslim holy days, such as Christmas, are recognized as holidays, only Muslim holidays are officially recognized as national holidays.

Non-Muslims complained that although the Government recognizes their religious holidays by law, in practice there is general disregard for those holidays. Schools routinely scheduled examinations during non-Muslim holidays, and no special dispensation was given to students wishing to observe them.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government. According to the Christian and Other Religions Endowment, approximately 20 foreign missionaries applied to operate in the country since the liberation; however, only 13 remain in the country. After learning of the registration requirements, which include having at least 500 followers, none of the organizations returned to complete the registration process.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools, and in most of the country students must study Islam for approximately 3 hours daily, in both primary and secondary school, as a requirement for graduation. Religious study is not mandatory in the north. Non-Muslim students are not required to participate in Islamic studies; however, some non-Muslim students reported that they felt pressure to do so. Alternative religious study is provided for in the curriculum of non-Muslim schools.

The law does not mention a penalty for the conversion from Islam to non-Islamic faiths. Article 1(2) of the Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959, states: "If no legislative text can be applied, then the judgment should be taken from Shari'a principles (Islamic law) most suitable to the texts of this law." Under Islamic law, conversion to another religion is a criminal offense subject to the death penalty. Article 1 of the Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969, however, mandates that criminal penalties can only be imposed by law. Thus, despite the Shari'a punishment for conversion, the Iraqi penal code does not import the Shari'a penalty, nor does it contain a similar penalty. The Law of Civil Affairs No. 65 of 1972 explicitly allows non-Muslims to convert to Islam.

Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) Resolution 201 of 2001, which prohibits the Wahhabi branch of Islam and mandates the death penalty for adherents if the charge is proved, and Law No. 105 of 1970, which prohibits the Baha'i Faith, are technically still part of the law. The TAL's provisions on freedom of religion should, by the terms of the TAL, supersede these laws; however, at the end of the reporting period, no court had ruled on them in relation to the TAL.

Although the Personal Status Law of 1959 calls for incorporation of Shari'a into the law in the absence of legislative text on a matter, Article 2(1) expressly exempts from its application individuals covered by special law. Such special law includes British Proclamation No. 6 of 1917 and the Personal Status Law of Foreigners, No. 38 of 1931. Proclamation No. 6 provides that the country's civil courts consult the religious authority of the non-Muslim parties for its opinion under the applicable religious law and apply this opinion in court. The Personal Status Law of Foreigners requires that courts apply the municipal law of the foreign litigants to resolve their domestic law matters.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practices did not interfere with the free practice of religion; however, the ongoing insurgency had a significant, negative impact on the ability of all religious believers to practice their faith. Additionally, the ISF's lack of capability and capacity resulted in deficiency in the rule of law, which impeded the right of citizens to worship according to their conscience.

The country's first democratically elected government was generally representative of the country's diversity, despite the Sunni boycott of the January elections. The Sunni Arab minority had seats in the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) but proportionally far fewer than their share of the overall population. Sunni Arabs held positions in the cabinet, including senior positions, such as minister of defense, vice president, and deputy prime minister. Some non-Muslim minorities, such as the Sabeans, were not represented in either the TNA or the Government.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular faith, religious beliefs, or interpretations of religious doctrine. Although the political coalitions created for the January elections were based predominantly on religion or ethnicity, religious belief or ethnicity was not a requirement for participation. For example, the Kurdish List, which won 27 percent of the seats in the TNA, comprised Sunnis, Shi'a, Christians, and Yazidi; the Iraqiyun List also in-

cluded different ethnicities and religions. Likewise, the winning Shi'a Coalition, although comprising predominantly Shi'a Islamists, also included religious and ethnic minorities, such as Sunnis, Yazidi, Kurds, Turkmen, and Shabak. The Shi'a Coalition also included secular Shi'a and political independents not associated with any religious party.

The composition of the Transitional Government reflected the majority status of the Shi'a, who were politically and economically disadvantaged under the former regime. Although the Transitional Government publicly supported the freedom of all individuals to worship as they chose, there were some reports of discrimination by Shi'a elements in the Government against Sunni and non-Muslim minorities.

The Wahhabi branch of Islam and the Baha'i Faith are technically prohibited by law; however, the TAL's provisions on freedom of religion should, by the terms of the TAL, supercede these laws. Nonetheless, by the end of the reporting period, no court had ruled on these laws in relation to the TAL.

The Personal Status Law of Foreigners requires that courts apply the municipal law of the foreign litigants to resolve their domestic law matters. Despite this exception in the 1959 Personal Status Law, there are instances in which this law, based on Shari'a principles, applies to non-Muslims, thereby overriding rules particular to their religion. For instance, the law forbids the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim; also, in the distribution of inheritance, a female receives one-half of what a male receives.

Many residents on the Ninewah Plain, who are mostly non-Muslim, were unable to vote in the January elections. According to the Assyrian International News Agency, only 93 of 330 polling places opened, ballot boxes were not delivered, and incidents of voter fraud and intimidation occurred. This resulted from administrative breakdowns on voting day and the refusal of Kurdish security forces to allow ballot boxes to pass to predominantly Christian villages, denying as many as 100,000 Assyrian Christians and smaller numbers of Sabeans of their right to vote in the elections. After an investigation of these allegations, the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) acknowledged that the voting facilities in Ninewah were inadequate. The IECI claimed that these irregularities were a manifestation of the poor security situation in Ninewah, Anbar, and other regions and not a problem that exclusively affected a particular segment of the population.

Passports do not indicate an individual's religion; however, religion is explicitly noted on the "jentsia," or national identity card.

Government employees were not prohibited from displaying elements of their religion, nor were they required to take any religious oaths as a condition for employment.

Students generally were not prohibited from practicing elements of their faith in school; however, during the reporting period, non-Muslim minorities and secular Arabs in some schools were increasingly forced, often under the threat of violence, to adhere to conservative Islamic practices. During the reporting period, Basrah's Education Director instituted a policy requiring all females in the schools to cover their heads. Additionally, all female university students in Mosul, even non-Muslims, were required to wear the hijab, or headscarf.

Disputes between Sunnis and Shi'a over mosques continued. According to the Shi'a Waqf, approximately 25 mosques built by the Shi'a were appropriated by the Saddam regime but have not been returned. The Sunni Arabs claimed that the Shi'a occupied 40 Sunni mosques. Additionally, there were approximately 35 mosques built under the former regime with state funds whose ownership had yet to be determined. Although a commission comprising Sunni and Shi'a representatives was established after liberation to address the question of religious property restitution, the issue remained unresolved.

Authorities have not permitted entry of religious pilgrims into the country to visit religious sites since the escalation of violence associated with the ongoing insurgency. Numerous pilgrims, primarily from Iran and Afghanistan, were detained during the reporting period, mainly because of security concerns. On May 19, in a joint press statement with the Iranian Foreign Minister, the Government announced an amnesty for the immediate release of Iranian pilgrims. The Prime Minister subsequently issued the order to implement the amnesty; however, the Presidency Council failed to do so. Nonetheless, some Iranians were released.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government does not officially engage in or tolerate abuses of an individual's right to religious freedom. However, it focused most of its resources and attention on the ongoing insurgency and reconstruction efforts during this reporting period; thus, it did not have the capacity to address actively issues relating to freedom of religion.

Many attributed the violence in the country—especially what appeared to be an upsurge in sectarian violence in early May—to terrorists, alleging they were responsible for killing Sunni and Shi'a clerics in an effort to incite sectarian violence. There were also numerous allegations that the ISF—specifically the Ministry of Interior's (MOI) Quick Reaction Forces (Wolf Brigade)—abducted, detained, tortured, and carried out extrajudicial killings against members of the Sunni Arab minority. In its May 21 communiqué, the Sunni Waqf condemned the raids and ISF's detentions of clerics and worshippers and demanded the establishment of an independent legal committee to investigate the alleged murder and torture of detainees. Also in May, the Minister of Interior announced he would launch an investigation, but no results were made public by the end of the reporting period, and no security official was known to have been punished for abuses of religious minorities.

The Sunni Arab community often cited ISF raids of its mosques and religious sites as an example of targeting by the Shi'a-dominated Government. On September 4 2004, approximately 150 police in Baghdad surrounded the Iraqi Institute of Peace (IIP), which is associated with the Anglican-sponsored International Center for Reconciliation. Police, looking for an insurgent, broke down the doors and ransacked the IIP building, stealing telephones and money. Four individuals identified themselves as being from the Ministry of Interior (MOI) but did not show badges. None of the 150 police wore uniforms or insignia. The incident ended with no serious injuries.

On May 5, ISF found the bodies of 14 Sunni farmers from Mada'in. According to witnesses, including one farmer who managed to escape, men in police uniforms detained, tortured, and killed the farmers. Their bodies were found buried in a mass grave near Sadr City in Baghdad. Because terrorists sometimes wear ISF uniforms, it is not clear who was responsible. MOI undertook an investigation of the incident, and the final results were pending at the end of the reporting period.

On May 19, ISF raided Baghdad's prominent Sunni Abu Hanifa Mosque as Friday prayers were ending, reportedly to detain alleged terrorists. Local leaders complained that gas was used and women were abused. The Prime Minister subsequently provided funds to the Sunni Waqf and promised a full investigation of the incident. On May 21, ISF broke into Amarra's Hetteen Mosque on the grounds that it was harboring terrorists. Subsequently, the ISF turned the mosque over to the Shi'a Endowment, which changed the mosque's name to Fatima Al Zahraa mosque.

Reports charged that several ministries, including Health and Communications, conducted large-scale firings of employees who were not Shi'a, often on the grounds that the employees fired were senior Ba'athists and/or security risks. Some non-Muslims accused the Government of discrimination, claiming that unqualified Shi'a applicants received preference over qualified non-Muslims. The Yazidi, while represented in the TNA, did not hold positions in either the Transitional Government or the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) at the director general level or above.

There were allegations that the KRG engaged in discriminatory behavior against religious minorities. Minorities such as Christians living north of Mosul claimed that the KRG confiscated their property without compensation and began building settlements on their land. Assyrian Christians also alleged that the KDP-dominated judiciary routinely discriminated against non-Muslims and failed to enforce judgments in their favor. Despite the allegations of KRG discrimination against religious minorities, many non-Muslims fled north from the more volatile areas in the middle and southern parts of the country where pressures to conform publicly to narrow interpretations of Islamic teaching were greater.

Sunni Arab leaders accused the Badr Organization, led by a TNA member, of assassinating Sunni clerics. Originally called the Badr Corps, this Shi'a militia was founded in the 1980s in Iran as a militant wing of SCIRI. It was trained and funded by the Iranian military and previously led by current SCIRI head Abd-al-Aziz Hakim. The group claimed it has relinquished its weaponry and become a strictly political organization, but few citizens believed this.

On May 20, Sunni mosque speakers and imams announced during Friday prayers the closure of mosques for 3 days in protest of the killing of clergy and raids against mosques. The day before, the Muslim Ulema Council issued a statement condemning the ISF and claiming that it had killed numerous imams and detained individuals praying in mosques. In a May 18 press conference, the head of the Muslim Scholars Association declared that police commandos and the Badr Organization killed two Sunni clerics during the week and called the series of killings "state terrorism by the Ministry of Interior." He presented no evidence. The Badr Organization and Shi'a Political Council subsequently rejected the allegations. Sunni leaders claimed that the Government's Wolf Brigade shot to death the Imam of Al-Shuhada Mosque, Hamid Mukhlif al-Dulaimi, on May 15 in his home in Baghdad. Sunni leaders also alleged that the Wolf Brigade detained and tortured Muslim Scholars Association Shura Council member Sheik Hassan al-Naimi with a drill before shooting

and killing him. MOI denied the involvement of the Wolf Brigade in these murders and promised an investigation of the incidents. The outcome of that investigation was pending at the end of the reporting period.

The previous regime appropriated a Sabean social club in Baghdad for which the community was given a check for approximately \$100,000 (160 million dinar). However, when the Sabeans submitted the check to the Ministry of Finance for payment in 2003, they were told that the signature was not legitimate, and payment on the check was refused. The Sabeans had neither gained back their property nor received compensation for it by the end of the reporting period.

The Armenian Church of Iraq was working with government officials to obtain the return of properties that the former regime forced it to sell. Although the church was paid fair market value for six properties in Mosul, Basrah, Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Dohuk, it was forced to sell the properties under pressure. Church officials said discussions with the Transitional Government yielded no results during the reporting period; however, they were optimistic about the KRG's return of property in the north.

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. However, there were reports that Islamic extremists threatened, kidnapped, and even killed Mandaeans for refusing to convert to Islam.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

The ongoing insurgency affected every segment of the population, Sunni, Shi'a, and non-Muslim alike. Minister of Interior Baqr Jabr announced on June 5 that 12,000 citizens, 10,000 of them Shi'a, perished in the previous 18 months of violence. Many believe that Sunni Arabs and former regime elements were responsible for the violence; however, Sunnis were also often among the victims.

While the general lawlessness that permitted criminal gangs and insurgents to victimize citizens with impunity affected Iraqis of all ethnicities and religions, many individuals were targeted because of their religious identity or secular leanings. Individuals fell victim not only to harassment and intimidation but also to kidnapping and even murder. Women and girls often were threatened, assaulted with acid, and even killed for refusing to wear hijab or for dressing in western-style clothing. Some women claimed they were denied employment and educational opportunities because they were non-Muslim, did not dress in accordance with conservative Islamic norms, or did not sufficiently adhere to strict interpretations of religious rules governing public behavior.

On March 17, Muqtada al-Sadr loyalists attacked picnicking Basrah University students, claiming they were violating the principles of Islam with their western-style clothing, singing, and dancing. The Sadrists fired guns at the students and beat them with sticks. University officials reported that at least 15 students were hospitalized, many with serious injuries. One student reportedly died in the incident.

Islamist militants harassed shopkeepers for providing goods or services they considered to be inconsistent with Islam and sometimes killed them for failing to comply with warnings to stop such activity. During the reporting period, leaflets were distributed in the town of Yousifiya forbidding the sale of cigarettes and cautioning barbers not to cut hair in the modern styles or use thread in removing facial hair, which results in smoother, more feminine-looking facial skin. In late December, captors took an Armenian Christian in Mosul from his business to a nearby mosque and told him to ask forgiveness for providing musical entertainment at parties. Warned to cease his activities or risk the welfare of his family, the man chose to close his business.

Liquor store owners, primarily Christians and Yazidi, were especially hard hit in attacks by Islamic extremists during the reporting period. In August 2004, masked gunmen shot and killed Sabah Macardige in Baghdad during broad daylight for selling alcohol. According to witnesses, Macardige had received warnings to stop selling liquor. In April, liquor store owner Sabah Sadiq's brother was kidnapped. Sadiq was shot on his way to pay the ransom demanded by the kidnappers. In June, armed intruders broke into Sami Tammu's liquor store in Baghdad and shot and killed him when he tried to escape. Liquor stores in Baghdad, Mosul, and Basrah were bombed, looted, and defaced. The Christian and Other Religions Endowment reported that approximately 95 percent of such establishments closed due to threats by Islamic extremists.

The Christian and Other Religions Endowment reported that, after a series of church bombings and incidents of violence targeting Christians during the reporting period, approximately 200,000 non-Muslims left the country or fled to the North. Many remained in Jordan or Syria awaiting improvement in the security situation.

On August 1 2004, four churches in Baghdad and two churches in Mosul were bombed. It was reported that 40 persons were killed and 300 injured in the Baghdad bombings alone. Christian leaders blamed foreign terrorists, including Al-Qaeda, for the attacks. Reportedly, Islamic extremists broke into a Chaldean Catholic home near Mosul on October 14 2004, and killed a 10-year-old boy because he was a Christian. On September 27 2004, four armed men killed seven Assyrian Christians in a terrorist attack in Dora.

A succession of car bombs on October 16 exploded near five churches in the early morning hours; however, there were no injuries. A November 9 car bombing at both St. George and Baghdad's St. Matthew's Church killed three and injured 40. On November 23 2004, St. George's Catholic Church in Baghdad received its second attack in a 2-week period.

On December 7 2004, the Armenian Catholic Church in Mosul was destroyed in a terrorist bombing. The Government conducted an investigation early in 2005; however, the results of that investigation were not released, and the Government has not provided funding to rebuild the structure as of the end of the reporting period. Several hours after the Armenian Church bombing, a group of armed intruders attacked the Chaldean Bishop's Palace, also in Mosul, and detonated explosive devices. Efforts to rehabilitate the Palace were started, but the work was halted due to lack of funds and security concerns.

On January 17 2005, insurgents kidnapped a Syrian Catholic Archbishop in an ambush in Mosul. The archbishop was released unharmed 2 days later.

Although Sabeen leaders stated that their community was targeted more for its perceived wealth than for its religion, there were reports that Islamic extremists threatened, kidnapped, and even killed Sabeens for refusing to convert to Islam.

On January 16, the President of the Mandaean Supreme Spritual Council, Basra Branch, was shot and killed after being approached by three gunmen who demanded that he convert to Islam. The Sabeen Mandaean Association in Australia reported that, on February 7, a group of Muslims approached a Sabeen deacon and priest trainee in Al Sowaira, demanding that he convert to Islam and assist in the conversion of other Sabeens. The deacon was severely beaten when he refused and an attempt was made to shoot him, but the gun misfired.

On February 15, armed men confronted Wafsi Majid Kashkul at his Baghdad jewelry store and demanded that he convert to Islam. When Kashkul refused, the men shot him and left without stealing anything from the shop. On March 14, three Sabeen brothers, Anweer, Shaukai, and Amer Juhily, reportedly were kidnapped from their Basrah home. The kidnappers demanded that the brothers convert to Islam; they refused and were shot and killed.

In addition to targeting non-Muslims, terrorists continued to attack both Sunni and Shi'a communities during the reporting period. Insurgents attacked mosques in Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods and killed clerics, other religious leaders, and private citizens of both sects. According to the Sunni and Shi'a Waqfs, approximately 50 Shi'a and 15 Sunni mosques were bombed during the reporting period. There were also accusations that both insurgents and militia wore police uniforms to incite sectarian violence and discredit the Government in the eyes of the public.

On September 20 2004, two Sunni clerics were killed in Baghdad, and three officials from SCIRI were also shot and killed. Sheikh Muhammed Jadoa al-Janabi, was killed in Baghdad's predominantly Shi'a al-Baya neighborhood, and armed men kidnapped and killed Sheikh Hazem al-Zeidi as he left a mosque in Baghdad's Sadr City district. Two bodyguards were also taken hostage but later released.

On November 23 2004, masked gunmen killed a Sunni cleric north of Baghdad. Sheikh Ghalib Ali al-Zuhairi, a member of the Muslim Scholars Association, was shot while leaving a mosque in the town of Muqdadiyah and died in the local hospital. On November 22, Sheik Faidi Faidi, also a member of the association, was shot and killed in Mosul.

On December 4 2004, a suicide bomber blew himself up near a Shi'a mosque in Baghdad's Sunni district of al-Adhamiya. The attack killed 16 persons and wounded more than a dozen others. Al-Zarqawi's organization, Group of Jihad in the Country of Two Rivers, claimed responsibility for the bombing on its website.

On January 12 2005, gunmen assassinated a representative of the Grand Aya-tollah Ali al-Sistani, the country's leading Shi'a spiritual leader. Sheikh Mahmoud al-Madaini, his son, and four bodyguards were killed in the attack, which took place in the town of Mada'ain.

On March 10, a suicide bomber blew himself up during a funeral ceremony for Shi'a religious leader Sayyid Hashem Araji in Mosul. It was reported that the explosion killed between 30 and 47 people and injured dozens more.

On May 14, the bodies of 10 Shi'a soldiers were found in Ramadi, which is located in the largely Sunni Al Anbar Province. On May 15, 13 blindfolded and bound men, who appeared to be Sunni, were found shot and killed in Baghdad in the same Shi'a district where the bodies of 14 Sunni were found the previous week. Eleven bodies were found at another Baghdad location on the same day, and another 11 bodies, reported to be those of Shi'a ambushed by Sunni guerrillas, were discovered south of Baghdad.

On May 20, the Imam of Baghdad's Al Hamza Mosque, Sheikh Ayad Khalid Muhammed al Samaraie, disappeared. His body subsequently was discovered in Baghdad's Al-Shoa'ala neighborhood. Samaraie had been shot in the head, and his body showed signs of torture.

On June 4, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a group of Sunnis as they were participating in a religious session in a house in central Balad. The attack killed 10 and wounded 12 persons.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite the tenuous security environment and the Government's preoccupation with fighting the insurgency and rebuilding the country's infrastructure, the Government made improvements in respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Although Shi'a Arabs are the largest religious group, Sunni Arabs were at a distinct advantage in all areas of secular life—civil, political, military, and economic—under the former regime. The Government for decades conducted a brutal campaign of killing, summary execution, and protracted arbitrary arrest against the religious leaders and followers of the majority Shi'a Muslim population and sought to undermine the identity of minority non-Muslim groups.

During the reporting period, the Government did not engage in the persecution of any religious group. The largely Shi'a Transitional Government routinely called for tolerance and the acceptance of all religious minorities. While the Sunni minority did not broadly participate in the January elections, resulting in only nominal representation in the TNA, the Transitional Government made special efforts to reach out to that community, as well as other religious minorities, to encourage Sunni participation in the political and constitutional development processes. Although the Constitutional Committee comprises only TNA members, it agreed to include a group of Sunnis to ensure adequate representation by that community. The Government agreed to allot the Sabbeans a seat on the Committee as well.

During the reporting period, government leaders repeatedly spoke of the need for all citizens to unite—regardless of religious orientation—to confront terrorism and often emphasized their commitment to equal treatment for all religions and ethnicities. Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari frequently expressed his concern over implications of the Government's involvement in violence against the Sunni Arab minority, and Minister of Interior Baqr Jabr undertook investigations of alleged ISF involvement in the unlawful detention, torture, and murder of Sunnis; however, by the end of the reporting period, no information regarding such investigations had been released to the public. The Government also made clear it would not exempt mosques and homes of religious leaders from assault if they were being used as insurgent strongholds.

In his first address to the country on May 3, the Prime Minister emphasized the diversity of his ministers but emphasized that they would work for a unified nation. The Government also publicly denounced all incidents of sectarian violence and, as such violence escalated in early May, repeatedly encouraged unity among the country's religious sects.

In a May 16 meeting with leading Shi'a cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Prime Minister Jafari stated that the Government would “strike with an iron fist against any criminal who tries to harm a Sunni or Shi'a citizen.”

On May 17, Minister of Defense Sad'un al-Dulaimi ordered the ISF to cease raids against Sunni and Shi'a mosques, saying that raids targeting mosques had increased and that they contradicted the principles of Islam. However, Dulaimi subsequently announced that the ISF would continue to raid mosques in which there were terrorists and weapons caches.

On June 5, Prime Minister Jafari met with Armenian Christian leaders to discuss the problems they faced. The Prime Minister agreed to provide security for all mosques and churches in the country and reaffirmed his commitment to protecting the right of all citizens to freedom of religion.

The Government also provided assistance to rebuild religious sites that were damaged by the insurgency. In November 2004, the Church of Septeen, which was dam-

aged by a car bomb in Baghdad's Al Andules Square, received \$100,000 (150 million dinar) from the Government for reconstruction efforts.

Religious leaders reported that they generally had good relations and worked together to promote interfaith understanding. The Sabeans sought the assistance of the Grand Ayatollah Sistani, SCIRI's Hakim, Prime Minister Jafari, and Muqtada al-Sadr in supporting minority rights.

Religious leaders of all faiths condemned the terrorist acts committed by the insurgency and urged the country's religious communities to refrain from retaliation and join together to end the violence.

On October 30 2004, a delegation of Chaldean Christians met with Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani to discuss efforts for building peace in the country.

On May 6, Sunnis and Shi'a joined together in protest of sectarian violence at the Al-Haq Mosque, where a mass joint prayer was held. On May 7, the Sunni Waqf in southern Iraq forbade the targeting of ISF of different ethnicities or political affiliations, stating that the country was suffering from a wave of distorted religious injunctions, or fatwas.

Similarly, in a May 19 statement, SCIRI leader Hakim told clerics, "Shi'a and Sunni alike," to unify against terrorists who were calling for sectarian war. Muqtada al-Sadr also called on both Sunni and Shi'a to show self-restraint in the face of the violence that targeted both groups and condemned such acts.

The Sunni Waqf's final communiqué from its May 21 conference stated that participants condemned sectarianism and discrimination and emphasized brotherhood amongst all citizens. The conference also condemned the random killings and attacks against mosques, including Shi'a mosques, as well as churches.

On May 28, prominent Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, Muslim Scholars Association Head Sheikh Harith al-Dhari, and SCIRI Head Abd-al-Aziz Hakim discussed ways to end sectarian violence and agreed to form groups to discuss accusations of revenge killings and to seek peaceful solutions to the violence. Talks subsequently stalled over al-Dhari's accusations regarding Shi'a involvement in Sunni killings.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The country's cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity is far better reflected in its political and economic structure than prior to the 2003 liberation. Shi'a Arabs, the religious majority of the population, were long disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially, but now constitute the majority in the Government.

Despite these changes, conservative and extremist Islamic elements continued to exert tremendous pressure on society to conform to their interpretations of Islam's precepts. Although this impacted both the Sunni and Shi'a secular Muslim population, non-Muslims were especially vulnerable to the pressure and violence because of their minority status and the lack of protection provided by a tribal structure.

The Sunnis claimed general discrimination—alleging revenge by the majority for the Sunnis' favored status under the former regime, but also because of the public's perception that the insurgency was composed primarily of Sunni extremists and former regime elements with whom the majority of the Sunni population supposedly sympathized. While some within the Sunni community supported and even assisted the insurgency, many denounced the terrorism as vocally as their non-Sunni counterparts.

Non-Muslims, particularly Christians, complained of being isolated by the Muslim majority because of their religious differences. Despite their statistically proportional representation in the National Assembly, many non-Muslims said they were disenfranchised and their interests not adequately represented.

In an April 20 missive to the Democratic Assyrian Party, the Kurdistan Islamic Union discouraged proselytizing, the distribution of Bibles, and the conduct of Christian conferences as contradicting the precepts of Islam. The letter further suggested that the Party take appropriate measures to avoid "future tragedies" that could result because of this "irresponsible" behavior.

The combination of discriminatory hiring practices, attacks against non-Muslim businesses, and the overall lack of rule of law have also had a detrimental economic impact on the non-Muslim community and contributed to the significant numbers of non-Muslims who left the country. The Armenian Diocese estimated that the number of destitute Armenian Christians, for example, had grown by 50 percent since 2003—a condition exacerbated by the inadequate security environment, which hampers Armenian Christians' ability to find employment. Terrorist threats have compelled tens of thousands of Christians, including Armenian Orthodox and Chaldean Christians, to leave the country in the wake of church bombings in 2004.

There were relatively few manifestations of anti-Semitism in the country, primarily because of the tiny size of the Jewish population; however, anti-Semitic feel-

ing remained a cultural under-current. According to the head of the Christian and Other Religions Endowment, the country's 2,700-year-old Jewish population had dwindled to only 20 people in the Baghdad area. There were also unverified reports of small numbers of Jews living in Kurdish areas. Only one synagogue remained in Baghdad's once-Jewish district of Bataween. The synagogue was unmarked and active only on high holy days.

There were unfounded rumors (sometimes spread in flyers distributed by anti-Government extremist groups) during the reporting period that Jewish expatriates were buying up real estate in an attempt to reassert their influence in the country. Another sign of anti-Semitic feeling was the hostile reaction that Sunni politician Mithal al-Alusi generated when he attended an international conference in Tel Aviv in September. Al-Alusi was indicted, but not prosecuted, under Saddam-era rules prohibiting visits to "enemy countries" and dismissed from his position in the Iraqi National Congress political party.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government is committed to promoting religious freedom and continues to work closely with the Government on this as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials at all levels, including the Secretary of State, members of Congress, the Ambassador, and Embassy officers, regularly engaged the Government on problems relating to freedom of religion. This took the form of public statements calling for unity in the face of sectarian violence, high-level meetings with government officials and religious leaders, and working-level interaction urging representatives of the Government and religious organizations to include minorities. The Embassy also facilitated interfaith discussion by hosting meetings, roundtables, and other events with all member faiths of the country's diverse religious communities, and funded training, seminars, conferences, and exchange programs to promote religious understanding and tolerance. At the same time, the U.S. Government has stressed that Coalition Forces will not forswear removing insurgents or weapons caches stored in mosques or the homes of religious leaders and arresting religious leaders who materially help the insurgency.

The Embassy's primary focus during the reporting period was on reducing sectarian violence, increasing Sunni and non-Muslim inclusion in the political and constitutional development processes, and increasing interfaith understanding. The U.S. worked to increase Sunni inclusion in the political process by providing technical assistance to Sunni leaders. U.S.-funded projects worked with religious minorities by bringing together members of different religious and ethnic backgrounds to discuss common issues. The U.S. also conducted a significant amount of conflict mitigation at the local level through its Community Action Program (CAP). Under the CAP, community groups were formed with diverse membership, including women and youth, in an effort to promote reconciliation. In ethnically or religiously mixed communities, these community groups included representatives from all segments of society. These groups identified and prioritized their needs and developed projects to address those needs. The projects did not specifically target any one ethnic or religious group for assistance. Rather, they sought opportunities to bridge differences.

At the request of leading Shi'a and Sunni clerics, the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) funded the establishment of an interfaith dialogue center to help unite religious groups against violence and foster an environment of tolerance, particularly between the Sunnis and Shi'a, as well as towards Christians and others. USIP trained 113 provincial-level government and civil society officials in interethnic facilitation. Twenty-five facilitators received advanced training and began establishing programs in their communities. USIP held workshops for students at the University of Kirkuk as well as inter-communal conflict management programs for political and civil society representatives in Baghdad. Also implemented and featured on national television and print media were awareness workshops on intercommunal tolerance for Shi'a and Sunni mothers and schoolteachers in Baghdad.

Projects totaling more than \$38.8 million (approximately 58 billion dinar) were completed in areas with a significant Christian presence. Additional projects totaling approximately \$272 million were underway at the end of the period covered by this report.

ISRAEL

Israel¹ has no constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, problems continued to exist stemming from the unequal treatment of religious minorities, and from the State's recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning Jews.

Relations among religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Muslims and Christians, between secular and religious Jews, and among the different streams of Judaism—often were strained. Tensions between Israeli Jews and Arabs increased significantly after the start of the Intifada in 2000 when Israeli police killed 12 Israeli-Arab demonstrators, prompting a 3-year public inquiry and investigation. The Orr Commission of Inquiry established to investigate the killings, found certain police officers guilty of wrongdoing, and concluded that the “Government’s handling of the Arab sector has been primarily neglectful and discriminatory,” that it “did not show sufficient sensitivity to the needs of the Arab population, and did not take enough action to allocate state resources in an equal manner.” The results of the inquiry were still a matter of official deliberation and public debate at the end of the reporting period. While the Government has taken several steps to address these issues, tensions remained high due to institutional, legal, and societal discrimination against the country’s Arab citizens.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Based on its pre-1967 borders, Israel has an area of approximately 7,685 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.8 million, of which 5.2 million are Jews (including Israeli settlers who live in the occupied territories), 1.3 million are Arabs, and approximately 290,000 are members of other minorities. Although the Government defines nearly 80 percent of the population as Jewish, approximately 300,000 of these citizens do not qualify as Jews according to the Orthodox Jewish definition or the definition used by the Government for civil procedures. According to government figures, approximately 4.5 percent of the Jewish population are Haredim, or ultra-Orthodox, and another 13 percent are Orthodox. The vast majority of Jewish citizens describe themselves as “traditional,” or “secular” Jews, and most of them observe some Jewish traditions. A growing but still small number of traditional and secular Jews associate themselves with the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist streams of Judaism, which are not officially recognized for purposes of civil and personal status matters involving their adherents. Although the Government does not officially recognize them, these streams of Judaism receive a small amount of government funding and are recognized by the country’s courts.

Numerous religious groups are represented in the country. Slightly more than 20 percent of the population is non-Jewish and the vast majority of them are ethnically Arab. Of this, approximately 80 percent is Muslim, 10 percent Christian, and 10 percent Druze. The non-Jewish populations are concentrated in the north, in Bedouin communities in the Negev region to the south, and in the narrow band of Arab villages in the central part of the country adjacent to the occupied territories. Relatively small communities of evangelical Christians, Messianic Jews (those who consider themselves Jewish but believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah), and Jehovah’s Witnesses also reside throughout the country. In an April 2005 media report, a leader of the Jewish Messianic community estimated that Messianic Jews in Israel number approximately 10,000 persons. Media sources also indicate that the number of Messianic Jews in Israel has grown rapidly over the past decade, with many new adherents coming from the Russian immigrant community.

The Government reported that approximately 60,000 to 70,000 legal foreign workers live in Israel, but Kav La Oved (Workers Hotline), an Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO) advocating for workers’ rights, places the number closer to 100,000 and estimates that the inclusion of illegal foreign workers brings the total number of foreign workers to approximately 200,000. Most of the foreign workers are Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Buddhist, or Hindu.

¹The religious freedom situation in the Occupied Territories is discussed in the annex appended to this report.

The Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty describes the country as a “Jewish” and “democratic” state. Most members of the non-Jewish minority are generally free to practice their religions but are subject to various forms of discrimination, some of which have religious dimensions.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Israel has no constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Declaration of Independence describes the country as a “Jewish state,” but also provides for full social and political equality regardless of religious affiliation. While the law explicitly guarantees freedom of religion and the safeguarding of “holy places of all religions,” inequities exist. Israeli Arabs and other non-Jews generally are free to practice their religions; however, discrepancies in treatment exist between Jews and various non-Jewish communities, and between Orthodox Jews and Jews of non-Orthodox affiliations.

The “status quo” agreement reached at the founding of the state, and that has been upheld throughout the State’s history, guarantees the Government will implement certain policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. For example, the Government does not recognize Jewish marriages performed in the country unless they are performed by the Orthodox Jewish establishment. The Orthodox Jewish establishment also determines who is buried in Jewish state cemeteries, limiting this right to individuals considered “Jewish” by the Orthodox standards. In addition, the national airline El Al and public buses in most cities do not operate on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath; however, several private bus companies do. Additionally, streets in most Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods are closed to vehicles on the Sabbath. According to the Law on Work and Rest Hours of 1951, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in April 2005, Jews in most professions are prohibited from working on the Sabbath unless they are granted a special permit by the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Employment.

In April 2004, the High Court rejected a petition demanding that the Ministry of the Interior enforce the prohibition on the public display of leavened products for sale during the Passover holiday, but it did not rule on the legality of the prohibition. Then, in March 2005, following the Interior Minister’s announcement that he would not enforce the prohibition, Prime Minister Sharon reportedly instructed the Minister to enforce the prohibition. In recent practice, however, the Government has not enforced this law. There were no reports of its enforcement during the reporting period. In regions inhabited primarily by non-Jews, bread is displayed and sold openly during Passover.

In 2003, the High Court suspended several municipal prohibitions and curbs on the sale of pork and instructed municipalities to allow sales of pork in neighborhoods where no more than an unspecified, small portion of the residents would object on religious grounds. The result of the decision was to allow each municipality to determine on its own whether to allow the sale of pork.

The law recognizes as “religious communities” those recognized by and carried over from the British Mandate. These include: Eastern Orthodox, Latin (Roman Catholic), Gregorian-Armenian, Armenian-Catholic, Syrian (Catholic), Chaldean (Uniate), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Jewish. Since the founding of the country, the Government has recognized three additional religious communities—the Druze in 1957, the Evangelical Episcopal Church in 1970, and the Baha’i in 1971. The status of several Christian denominations with representation in the country has been defined by a collection of ad hoc arrangements with various government agencies. The fact that the Muslim population was not defined as a religious community was a vestige of the Ottoman period, where Islam was the dominant religion, and does not affect the rights of the Muslim community to practice their faith. The Government allows members of unrecognized religions the freedom to practice their religion. According to the Government, there were no religious denominations awaiting recognition during the reporting period.

With some exceptions, each recognized religious community has legal authority over its members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial. Legislation enacted in 1961 afforded the Muslim courts exclusive jurisdiction to rule in matters of personal status concerning Muslims. For so-called “unrecognized religions,” no local religious tribunals exercised jurisdiction over their members in matters of personal status. In addition, unlike recognized religious communities, unrecognized religious communities do not receive government funding for their religious services. The Arrangements Law provides exemption from municipal taxes for any place of worship of a recognized faith. Exemption from tax payments is also granted to churches that

have not been officially recognized by law. In several cases, the Government has interpreted that exemption from municipal taxes to apply only to that portion of the property of religious organizations that was actually used for religious worship. Not-for-profit religious schools also receive tax exemptions. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) had tax-exemption status for its hospital on the Mount of Olives for more than 30 years until the District Court revoked this privilege in 2002. After several rescheduled hearings, the Supreme Court was scheduled to hear LWF's case for tax exemption on December 1, 2005.

Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but parties, by mutual agreement, may bring such cases to religious courts. Jewish and Druze families may ask for some family status matters, such as alimony and child custody in divorces, to be adjudicated in civil courts as an alternative to religious courts. Christians may ask that child custody and child support cases be adjudicated in civil courts rather than in religious courts. Muslims have the right to bring matters such as alimony and property division associated with divorce cases to civil courts in family-status matters. However, paternity cases remain under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Muslim or Shari'a Court. There is no overarching law or directive that prescribes these varying approaches.

In March 2004, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was officially dismantled and its 300 employees reassigned to several other ministries. As a result, the Ministry of the Interior now has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups; the Ministry of Tourism is responsible for the protection and upkeep of all holy sites, and the Prime Minister's office has jurisdiction over the nation's 134 religious councils (one Druze and the rest Jewish) that oversee the provision of religious services to their respective communities. Legislation establishing religious councils does not include non-Jewish religious communities other than the Druze. Instead, the Ministry of the Interior directly funds religious services for recognized non-Jewish communities. The State, through the Prime Minister's office, continues to finance approximately 40 percent of the religious councils' budgets, and local authorities fund the remainder.

According to government budget figures, the Prime Minister's Office transferred approximately \$30 million for religious councils in 2004 and local authorities were supposed to transfer \$47 million (NIS 214, 926, 720) to the religious councils as well. The Government also transferred an additional estimated \$15.5 million (NIS 71 million) in a one-time move to the religious councils pursuant to a court ruling. Together, the religious councils' budget for 2004 was approximately \$92.5 million. The Government reported that the 2005 religious services budget for the non-Jewish communities including the Druze (it did not provide 2004 figures) totaled approximately \$6.5 million.

Arab advocacy groups continue to charge that the State did not allocate adequate or proportional funds for the provision of religious services in Arab towns and villages. A reputable representative of the Arab Christian community criticized the Government in April 2005 for not allocating enough funds for Christian institutions. The Government claimed, however, that funding for religious services in Arab communities has been proportional to the size of the community.

Under the Law of Return, the Government grants immigration and residence rights to individuals who meet established criteria defining Jewish identity. Included in this definition is a child or grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew, and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew. A separate, more rigorous standard based on Orthodox Jewish criteria is used to determine the right to full citizenship, entitlement to government financial support for immigrants, the legitimacy of conversions to Judaism performed within the country, and Jewish status for purposes of personal and some civil status issues. Residency rights are not granted to relatives of converts to Judaism, except for children of female converts who are born after the mother's conversion is complete. The Law of Return does not apply to non-Jews or to persons of Jewish descent who have converted to another faith. Approximately 36 percent of the country's Jewish population was born outside of the country.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) has charged that the Ministry of the Interior's Population Registry has subjected non-Jewish spouses and non-Jewish adopted children of Jewish immigrants to unfair and at times arbitrary policies for proving the bona fides of their relationship for residency purposes. Most of these cases involve persons who immigrated under the Law of Return from the former Soviet republics and their non-Jewish spouses and non-Jewish adopted children. In August 2004, the Minister of the Interior acknowledged the problems and took steps to change certain policies. For example, in August 2004, the Minister of Interior announced that he was canceling his ministry's requirement that immigrants from the former Soviet republics deposit a \$7,000 (30,000-shekel) bank guarantee before al-

lowing their non-Jewish spouses to enter the country. The deposit was to be returned once the spouse was granted residency.

In 2003, the Government began issuing new and replacement identification cards that do not carry a “nationality” (e.g., usually religious) designation. Citizens and residents are still required to register with the Ministry of the Interior’s Population Registry as one of a set list of nationalities. During the period covered by this report, the Ministry of the Interior issued to individuals arriving in the country immigration forms with an item for travelers to list their religion. Immigration officials were inconsistent in seeking compliance, and the form has since been amended to omit any questions on religious affiliation.

Under the law, ultra-Orthodox Jews are entitled to exemption from military service to pursue religious studies. This exemption allows ultra-Orthodox Jews to postpone military service in 1 year intervals to pursue full-time religious studies at recognized yeshivas, or religious schools. These students must renew their deferments each year by proving that they are full-time students. At the age of 22, the yeshiva students are given 1 year to decide whether to continue to study full time with yearly renewals until they reach the age of 40; to perform community service for one year, and thereafter, 21 days each year until the age of 40; or to serve in the army until they finish their military service requirement. According to the Government, approximately 9 percent of all male candidates for military service are exempted as full-time yeshiva students. In February 2004, due to political pressure from the secular Shinui party and some sectors of society, the Government appointed a parliamentary committee to propose ways to broaden military service to include yeshiva students and to integrate ultra-Orthodox Jews into the workforce. At the end of the reporting period, the committee had not issued its recommendations.

Public Hebrew-speaking secular schools teach mandatory Bible and Jewish history classes. These classes primarily cover Jewish heritage and culture, rather than religious belief. Public schools with predominantly Arab student bodies teach mandatory classes on the Qur’an and the Bible, since both Muslim and Christian Arabs attend these schools. Orthodox Jewish religious schools that are part of the public school system teach mandatory religion classes, as do private ultra-Orthodox schools that receive some state funding.

The Government recognizes the following Jewish holy days as national holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simhat Torah, Passover, and Shavuot. Arab municipalities often recognize Christian and Muslim holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Muslim, Christian, and Orthodox Jewish religious authorities have exclusive control over personal status matters, including marriage, divorce, and burial, within their respective communities. The law does not allow civil marriage, and it does not recognize Jewish marriage performed in the country unless performed by recognized Orthodox rabbis. Many Jewish Israelis object to such exclusive control by the Orthodox establishment over Jewish marriages and other personal status issues, and to the absence of provision for civil marriage, for approximately 300,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union were not recognized as Jewish by Orthodox authorities.

The 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law applies to holy sites of all religions within Israel, and the Penal Code makes it a criminal offense to damage any holy site. The Government, however, has issued implementing regulations only for Jewish sites. In November 2004, the Arab Israeli advocacy group Adalah petitioned the High Court to compel the Government to issue regulations to protect Muslim sites, charging that the Government’s failure to do so had resulted in desecration and the conversion of several sites into commercial establishments. In its petition, Adalah stated that all of the 120 places designated by the Government as holy sites are Jewish. At the end of the reporting period, the case was still pending. The Arab Association for Human Rights (AAHR) issued a comprehensive report in December 2004 documenting what it refers to as the “destruction and abuse of Muslim and Christian holy places in Israel.” In its report, AAHR asserted that 250 non-Jewish places of worship had either been destroyed during and after the 1948 war or made inaccessible to the local Arab population. Lands of destroyed Arab villages were given to Jewish farmers, and the surviving mosques in these villages had been used as animal pens or storage depots. In a town south of Haifa, Ein Hod, the mosque was turned into a bar. The Government stated that in March 2004, there was a fire in an abandoned mosque in Beit She’an, resulting in a collapse of the structure. Beyond this incident, there were no reports of damage to holy sites during the reporting period.

During Jewish holidays and following terrorist attacks, the Government imposed internal and external closures for security purposes that had the effect of restricting

access to holy sites in the country for Arab Muslims and Christians, as well as Israeli Arabs and Palestinians who possess Jerusalem identification cards. The construction of the separation barrier also impeded access to holy sites in Jerusalem during the reporting period.

The Government permits religious organizations to apply for state funding to maintain or build religious facilities. Funding has been provided for the maintenance of facilities such as churches, Orthodox synagogues, mosques, and cemeteries. Funding for construction has not been provided for non-Orthodox synagogues. Several civil rights NGOs assert that Orthodox Jewish facilities receive significantly greater proportions of funding than do non-Orthodox Jewish and non-Jewish facilities. Muslim groups complain that the Government has not equitably funded the construction and maintenance of mosques in comparison to the funding of synagogues. AAHR reported that the Government was reluctant to refurbish mosques in areas where there is no longer a Muslim population, and has never in its history budgeted for the building of a new mosque. The Government stated that the AAHR report referred to abandoned sites and not to active sites, and the abandoned sites were not properly maintained. There is no restriction on the construction of new mosques in Israel, but the Government noted that while the state budget does not cover the costs of new construction, it does provide assistance in the maintenance of mosques. The Government cited examples of mosques that received government assistance for their maintenance in 2004, including mosques in Romana, Bartaa, Baana, Daburiya, Bir al Maksur, Bustan Almarge, Maala Iron, Hualad, and Hura, which altogether received approximately \$313,000 (NIS 1,420,000).

Muslim residents of the Be'er Sheva area, including members of Bedouin tribes, have protested the municipality's intention to reopen the city's old mosque as a museum rather than as a mosque for the area's Muslim residents. The High Court rejected a petition from Adalah, representing the area's Muslim community, to enjoin the municipality from renovating the mosque into a museum. The petitioners argued that there were no alternative mosques in the Be'er Sheva area. In January 2005, the High Court issued an interim opinion suggesting that the mosque be used as an Islamic cultural and social center by the Muslim community of Be'er Sheva, but not for prayer. In February 2005, the municipality issued a response rejecting this suggestion, and insisting that the mosque be opened as a museum. According to Adalah, the Attorney General also submitted a response to the High Court supporting the Be'er Sheva Municipality's position that the building not be used as an Islamic Cultural Center. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Building codes for places of worship are enforced selectively based on religion. Several Bedouin living in unrecognized villages were denied building permits for construction of mosques, and in the past, the Government has destroyed mosques built in unrecognized Bedouin communities. In 2003, Government officials demolished a mosque serving approximately 1,500 residents in the unrecognized Bedouin village of Tel al-Maleh that was constructed without a permit. According to the Regional Council for the Arab Unrecognized Villages in the Negev, in 2003 and 2004, the Government issued demolition orders for three mosques in Um al-Hiran, al-Dhiyya, and Tel al-Maleh respectively; all three were unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev and built without the proper permits. The Regional Planning and Building Committee in the Negev stated that it was unaware that the building marked for demolition in al-Dhiyya was a mosque. By the end of the reporting period, the demolition orders still stood. In Um al-Hiran, the Government had issued orders to demolish the mosque and the villagers have been fined approximately \$7,000 (NIS 30,000) for building the structure without a permit. The Tel al-Maleh case was transferred to a lower court for review and the case was pending. In contrast, according to a former Tel Aviv municipal council member, in recent years approximately 100 illegal synagogues have operated in Tel Aviv, some within apartment buildings and others in separate structures.

A 1977 anti-proselytizing law prohibits any person from offering or receiving material benefits as an inducement to conversion. No reports exist of attempts to enforce the law during the reporting period.

Missionaries are allowed to proselytize, although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) voluntarily refrains from proselytizing under a signed agreement with the Government.

The Knesset has not yet ratified the Fundamental Agreement establishing relations between the Holy See and Israel that was negotiated in the 1990s. In a separate process, representatives of the Government and the Holy See held several negotiating sessions since September 2004 with the aim of reaching an agreement (concordat) on fiscal and legal matters. The negotiations addressed the issues of tax exemption of Roman Catholic institutions and property and the access of the Roman

Catholic Church to Israeli courts. No agreement had been reached by the end of the period covered by this report.

Since the Government does not have diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Muslim citizens must travel through another country, usually Jordan, to obtain travel documents for the Hajj. The average number of Hajj pilgrims traveling from the country each year is approximately 4,500, and the overall number allowed to participate in the Hajj is determined by Saudi Arabian authorities. According to the Government, travel to hostile countries, including travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj, may be restricted; however, these restrictions are based on security concerns rather than on any religious or ethnic factors.

During the reporting period, many groups and individuals of numerous religions traveled to the country freely. Members of the Messianic Jewish community, however, charged that during the year, Government officials detained and denied entry to several of their members who were seeking to enter the country. For example, in November 2004, an American citizen, who identified himself as a Messianic Jew, reported to the press that officials at Ben Gurion Airport charged him with the intent to engage in illegal missionary activity, temporarily denied him entry into Israel, threatened to expel him, and held him in a jail near the airport for 24 hours. He was eventually allowed to enter Israel.

According to representatives of Christian institutions, the process of visa issuance for Christian religious workers significantly improved after a period in 2003 when the Government refused to grant residence visas to approximately 130 Catholic clergy assigned to Israel and the occupied territories. The Ministry of the Interior's Christian Department reported that it approved most of the 3,000 applications made by clergy during the reporting period.

The Government discriminates against non-Jewish citizens and residents, the vast majority of whom are Arab Muslims and Christians, in the areas of employment, education, and housing. The Orr Legal Commission of Inquiry, established to investigate the 2000 police killing of 12 Israeli-Arab demonstrators, issued a final report in 2003 noting historical, societal, and governmental discrimination against Arab citizens. The Orr Commission's report also charged the Government with failure to allocate state resources in an equitable manner, and concluded that government neglect resulted in poverty, unemployment, a shortage of land, significant shortcomings in the education system, a substantially defective infrastructure, and other serious problems in the Arab sector.

According to a March 2005 media report, approximately 8,000 non-Jewish soldiers were serving in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The IDF policy is to allow non-Jewish soldiers to go on home leave for their respective religious holidays. Military duties permitting, Jewish soldiers can leave on holidays. These duties rotate to allow some soldiers to go home for Jewish holidays. The IDF itself conducts commemorative activities appropriate for each respective Jewish holiday.

The IDF does not have any Muslim or Christian chaplains because, according to Government sources, the frequent home leave accorded all soldiers allows Muslim and Christian soldiers easy and regular access to their respective clergy and religious services at home. There have been discussions between the IDF and the National Security Council regarding chaplain appointments for non-Jewish IDF soldiers, but no decision has been made. The Government uses private non-Jewish clergy as chaplains at military burials when a non-Jewish soldier dies in service. In 2003, however, according to the family of an Israeli Christian soldier killed in a terrorist attack, the IDF did not have a military priest available to officiate at their son's burial. The soldier was buried in a non-Jewish section of the military cemetery in a non-religious ceremony without a religious figure to officiate. All Jewish chaplains in the IDF are Orthodox.

The IDF sponsored Orthodox Jewish conversion courses for Jewish soldiers who do not belong to Orthodox Judaism and for non-Jewish soldiers seeking to convert to Judaism. The IDF does not facilitate conversion to other religions.

Military service is compulsory for Jews and Druze. Orthodox Jews can obtain exemptions from service for full-time religious study. Some Arab citizens, mainly Bedouin, are accepted as volunteers. Approximately 90 percent of Israeli Arabs do not serve in the army. Israeli-Arab advocacy groups have charged that housing, educational, and other benefits, as well as employment preferences based on military experience, effectively discriminate in favor of the Jewish population, the majority of whom serve in the military. In December 2004, the Ivri Committee on National Service recommended to the Government that Israeli Arabs be afforded an opportunity to perform alternative nonmilitary service. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had not yet considered these recommendations.

During the year, observers noted that airport immigration officials denied entry on several occasions to non-Jews who arrived with mutilated passports, whereas Jews with damaged travel documents were allowed entry.

The Government has different education standards for Orthodox Jewish and non-Orthodox Jewish schools receiving funding. State-subsidized ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious schools have not been compelled, as have other types of schools, to comply with the law requiring all state-funded schools to teach core curriculum subjects, such as mathematics. The High Court ruled in December 2004 that ultra-Orthodox Jewish religious schools that do not comply with the Education Ministry's core curriculum by the opening of the 2007 school year will not be eligible for any funding from the Ministry. The ruling was a response to a petition filed by the Secondary Schools Teachers' Association against the Ministry of Education charging that while the Ministry cut funding to the public school system, causing hundreds of teachers to lose their jobs, it provided approximately \$40 million to autonomous ultra-Orthodox schools that do not comply with Ministry pedagogical requirements. In response to the court ruling, the Ministry is reportedly establishing criteria for the funding of schools that are not state-run.

Government resources available for religious/heritage studies to Arab and to non-Orthodox Jewish public schools are proportionately less than those available to Orthodox Jewish public schools. According to the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), approximately 96 percent of all state funds for Jewish religious education were allocated exclusively to Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools, both public and private Arab public schools offer studies in both Islam and Christianity, but the funding for such studies is disproportionately less than for religious education courses in Jewish Orthodox schools.

Quality private religious schools for Israeli Arabs exist; however, parents often must pay tuition for their children to attend such schools due to inadequate government funding. Jewish private religious schools, however, receive significant government funding in addition to philanthropic contributions from within the country and abroad, which effectively lowers the schools' tuition costs.

Government funding to the different religious sectors is disproportionate to the sectors' sizes. Civil rights NGOs have charged that the Government favors Orthodox Jewish institutions in the allocation of state resources for religious activities.

IRAC noted that approximately 97 percent of public funding for Jewish cultural and educational activities goes to Orthodox Jewish organizations, despite IRAC's estimate that non-Orthodox Jewish institutions account for approximately 20 percent of all Jewish cultural activities. In response to a petition filed by IRAC in 2002, the Supreme Court ruled in December 2004 that the Government must create new criteria for state funding of Jewish cultural activities.

In spite of legal provision for public funding to build non-Orthodox synagogues, the Government had not funded the construction of any non-Orthodox synagogues. In 2003, IRAC petitioned the High Court on behalf of a reform congregation in Modi'in to require that Modi'in municipality fund construction of a reform synagogue. The city already funded eight Orthodox synagogues, but none that were conservative or reform. The High Court ruled in 2003 that it was permissible to use state funds for the construction of a Reform synagogue in the city of Modi'in and ordered the municipality to repeat the process for determining which congregations would receive funding and to use criteria that would guarantee and provide equal treatment. Nevertheless, the request for funding stalled in the Modi'in municipality, while the municipality had been using Housing Ministry funding to make allocations to Orthodox synagogues. IRAC again petitioned the High Court to compel the municipality to hold a hearing to consider all available budget requests for synagogue construction in light of the needs of Modi'in residents. IRAC also petitioned the court to freeze all municipal allocations for synagogue construction in Modi'in until such a hearing is held. At the end of the reporting period, the case remained pending with the municipality.

In 1998, the High Court of Justice ruled that discrepancies in budget allocations between religious institutions in the Jewish and non-Jewish sectors constituted "prima facie" evidence of discrimination. In 2000, the plaintiffs from the 1998 High Court case brought a case contending discrimination in the allocation of resources for religious cemeteries. The High Court agreed with the plaintiffs that non-Jewish religious cemeteries were receiving inadequate resources and ordered the Government to increase funding to such cemeteries.

The 1996 Alternative Burial Law established the right of any individual to be buried in a civil ceremony, and required the establishment of 21 public civil cemeteries throughout the country. However, at the end of the reporting period, 1 public civil cemetery had been established in the country, in Be'er Sheva, and approximately 15 Jewish cemeteries in the country contained a section for civil burials. Several do-

mestic civil rights and immigrant groups asserted that the Government failed to allocate adequate space or sufficient funds for the establishment of civil cemeteries. Civil burials are also offered by certain Kibbutzim, but, according to some NGOs, such burials are expensive. The Government reported that the 2004 capital budget for civil cemeteries was approximately \$760,000. It reported that in 2004, the administrative budget for Jewish cemeteries was approximately \$2 million, and claimed that no capital budget was allocated.

Only approximately 7 percent of land is privately held. Most Israelis who control land, either for residential or business use, including farms, lease their land from the Government on long-term leases. Of the 93 percent of the land not in private hands, the Government directly controls the vast bulk, but approximately 12.5 percent is owned by the state through the quasi-public Jewish National Fund (JNF). The Israel Land Administration, a government agency, manages both the land directly owned by the Government and the JNF land. The JNF's charter prohibits it from leasing land to non-Jews. In addition, the Jewish Agency, an organization that promotes Jewish immigration to the country and develops residential areas on both public and JNF land, as a matter of policy does not lease land to non-Jews. In 2000, the High Court ruled that the State may not allocate land to its citizens on the basis of religion or nationality, even if it allocates the land through a third party such as the Jewish Agency. The Court's decision precludes any restrictions on the leasing or sale of land based on nationality, religion, or any other discriminatory category. With respect to this ruling, official JNF policy has not changed; no other cases arose after the initial 2000 ruling during the period covered by this report.

In October 2004, civil rights groups petitioned the High Court of Justice to block a Government bid announcement involving JNF land that effectively banned Arabs from bidding. The Government then halted marketing of JNF land in the Galilee and other areas of the north, where there are large Arab populations. In December 2004, Adalah petitioned the High Court to require the Government to apply non-discriminatory procedures for allocating land and to conduct open land sales/leases to Arabs as well as to Jews. In January 2005, the Attorney General ruled that the Government cannot discriminate against Israeli Arabs in the marketing and allocation of lands it manages, including lands that the Israel Land Administration manages for the Jewish National Fund. Adalah criticized the Attorney General, however, for also deciding that the Government should compensate the JNF with land equal in size to any plots of JNF land won by non-Jewish citizens in government tenders.

Exclusive control over marriages resides by law with recognized bodies of the recognized religious denominations. Accordingly, anyone wishing to marry in a secular ceremony, Jews wishing to marry in non-Orthodox religious ceremonies, Jews not officially recognized as Jewish by the Orthodox Jewish establishment but wishing to marry in Jewish ceremonies, and Jews wishing to marry someone of another faith must all do so abroad. The Ministry of the Interior recognizes such marriages. According to Central Bureau of Statistics figures released in March 2005, 7,089 Israelis married abroad in 2002, compared to 3,639 in 1997. Others hold weddings unrecognized by the Government, including Reform and Conservative weddings and those conducted by Kibbutz authorities.

In March 2004, the Knesset (Parliament) rejected two bills that would have allowed for civil marriage in Israel. In July 2004, the chairman of a Knesset committee established to formulate a civil marriage option announced that the committee would not complete its work or issue recommendations due to what he characterized as political interference with the committee's work. In April 2005, the High Court instructed the Government to inform it within 3 months of the Government's position on whether to recognize so-called "consular marriages," those conducted by officials of foreign embassies in the country. Government recognition of consular marriages would enable couples in Israel with no religious affiliation, or those of a religion not recognized by the Government, to wed in such civil ceremonies.

In December 2004, the Government reached an agreement with the Chief Rabbinate to limit required prenuptial instruction to those Jewish religious laws that are directly connected to the marriage ceremony and not require Jewish couples to receive instruction on Orthodox Jewish laws of ritual purity.

The State does not recognize conversions to Judaism performed in the country by non-Orthodox rabbis. In March 2005, the High Court ruled that, for the purpose of conferring citizenship rights, the Government must recognize those non-Orthodox conversions of noncitizen legal residents that were begun in Israel but formalized abroad by acknowledged Jewish religious authorities, even if not of the Orthodox strain. In a separate May 2004 ruling, the court determined that non-Jews who move to the country and then convert in the country through an Orthodox conversion are eligible to become immigrants and citizens pursuant to the Law of Return.

Previously, non-Jews were entitled to immigrate to the country and obtain full citizenship only if these conversions were conducted entirely abroad and under Orthodox standards. The High Court did not, however, rule on whether the Government must recognize non-Orthodox conversions formalized in Israel.

The Shinui Party, which ran in the 2002 national elections on a platform of ending the exclusive power of the Orthodox establishment over such issues as marriage and citizenship, left Prime Minister Sharon's governing coalition in December 2004 in protest over the allocation of approximately \$70 million in the 2005 budget for ultra-Orthodox religious institutions. Prime Minister Sharon allocated the funds as part of a coalition agreement with the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party to secure that party's support for the Gaza disengagement plan.

Under the Jewish religious courts' interpretation of personal status law, a Jewish woman may not receive a final writ of divorce without her husband's consent. Consequently, thousands of women, so-called "agunot," are unable to remarry or have legitimate children because their husbands have either disappeared or refused to grant divorces.

Rabbinical tribunals have the authority to impose sanctions on husbands who refuse to divorce their wives or on wives who refuse to accept divorce from their husbands. One Jewish U.S. citizen served more than 2 years in jail rather than grant his wife a writ of divorce. He was released approximately 1 year ago. In May 2004, a rabbinical court decided for the first time to jail a woman who refused to accept a divorce from her husband. Rabbinical courts also may exercise jurisdiction over, and issue sanctions against, non-Israeli Jews present in the country.

Some Islamic law courts have held that Muslim women may not request a divorce but that women may be forced to consent if a divorce is granted to the husband. One Arab Muslim woman who won a divorce from her abusive husband in a Muslim court subsequently filed a civil suit against the husband with the Magistrates Court in northern Israel. The court set a precedent in March by awarding the woman approximately \$10,000 in compensation for damage to her status and chances of remarrying. Divorced Arab women are stigmatized in their communities and experience difficulties remarrying.

Members of unrecognized religious groups, particularly evangelical Christians, sometimes face problems in obtaining marriage certifications or burial services similar to the problems faced by Jews who are not considered Jewish by the Orthodox establishment. Informal arrangements with other recognized religious groups provide relief in several cases.

Most Orthodox Jews believe that mixed gender prayer services violate the precepts of Judaism. As a result, such services are prohibited at the Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism, and men and women must use separate areas to visit the Western Wall. Women also are not allowed to conduct any prayers at the Western Wall wearing prayer shawls, which are typically worn by men, and cannot read from Torah scrolls. In 2003, the Women of the Wall, a group of more than 100 Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform women, lost their 14-year legal battle to hold formal women's prayer services at the Western Wall. The High Court ruled that the group could not hold prayer services at the Western Wall and instead would be permitted to hold them at nearby Robinson's Arch, part of an archeological site. The court ordered the Government to prepare an area at Robinson's Arch where women could read aloud from the Bible and conduct group prayers, and the Government inaugurated a plaza in this area for women's services in August 2004. According to IRAC, however, women who want to pray there must either provide the Government with 2 days' notice or pay the regular fee applicable for visiting the archeological site.

In 2003, IRAC petitioned the Supreme Court to overturn the government practice whereby the Adoption Service of the Ministry of Social Affairs places non-Jewish Israeli children only in Orthodox Jewish homes. Existing law requires that the adopted child must be of the same religion as the adopting parents. However, Representatives of IRAC reported that when no family of the same religion is willing to adopt the child, adoption officials consistently place the child with an Orthodox family. In such cases, the child's conversion to Judaism must be completed before the adoption is finalized. The Government defended its practice by arguing that the placement of non-Jewish children in Orthodox homes eliminates any subsequent legal uncertainty about the Jewish status of the children. At the end of the reporting period, the case was still pending.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

Palestinian terrorist organizations, including Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, committed acts of terror against Israelis during the period covered by this report. These attacks included an August 2004 twin suicide bombing of buses in Be'er Sheva, killing 16 persons and injuring more than 100. Hamas claimed responsibility. In November 2004, a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv killed 3 Israelis and wounded 30. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) claimed responsibility. Rocket attacks in June and September 2004 killed a total of four residents of Sderot. At least one group claiming responsibility for attacks, Hamas, includes anti-Semitic material on its website.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government appointed Oscar Abu-Razek, a Muslim Israeli Arab, as director general of the Ministry of Interior, the first Arab to serve in such a senior position in a government ministry. In addition, for the first time since the establishment of the State, an Arab was appointed as a permanent justice of the High Court.

According to government data, the number of non-Jewish directors on the boards of state-owned companies increased from 5.5 percent in 2002 to 8 percent in 2005. Prime Minister Sharon has stated publicly that increasing the number of non-Jewish board directors and the number of non-Jewish civil service employees are government priorities.

Members of the Knesset and the Chief Rabbinate attended a seminar in January 2005, hosted by the American Jewish Committee, to increase understanding of the various branches of Christianity. To enhance interfaith relations, seminar participants also visited the heads of various Christian denominations in Israel, including the Latin and Armenian patriarchs and a representative of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

A Knesset subcommittee was established in December 2004 to track the needs of the Israeli-Arab sector and recommend changes in the 2005 budget to benefit that sector. Mohammed Barakeh, a Knesset member from the Israeli-Arab party "Hadash," was appointed to head the subcommittee.

The Government established a new department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to fight anti-Semitism and commemorate the Holocaust.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among different religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Christians and Muslims, between Christians of different traditions, and among the different streams of Judaism—often are strained. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews are the result of historical grievances as well as cultural and religious differences, and they were compounded by governmental and societal discrimination against Israeli Arabs, both Muslim and Christian. These tensions were heightened by the Arab-Israeli conflict, and manifested in terrorist attacks targeting Israelis, IDF operations in the occupied territories, incidents of Jewish militants targeting Israeli Arabs, and incidents of Israeli Arab involvement in terrorist activity.

According to a March 2005 poll conducted by the Dahaf Institute, a majority of Israeli Jews believe that the state should encourage Israeli Arabs to emigrate. Similar surveys have also revealed a continuing increase in distrust between Israeli Jews and Arabs. An ultra-Orthodox weekly, *Sh'a Tova*, reportedly carried a comic strip for children with negative depiction of Arabs, including the statement, "Yes, a good Arab is a dead Arab." During the reporting period, Israeli Jewish fans of a Jerusalem soccer team shouted racist slogans against Israeli Arab soccer players during a match. In 2004, several Israeli Jews were indicted in one incident for shouting such slogans.

During the reporting period, incidents occurred in Jerusalem in which ultra-Orthodox Jewish youths assaulted Arabs and spray-painted anti-Arab graffiti.

In October 2004, a yeshiva student spat at the Armenian archbishop of Jerusalem while he was engaged in a religious procession through the Old City. The student was arrested and ordered to remain away from the Old City for 75 days. He also made a formal apology. The Holy See and the country's Chief Rabbinate issued a joint condemnation of the assault at the end of a meeting of Catholic and Jewish officials near Rome shortly after the incident.

The phrases "Death to Arabs" and "Death to Gentiles" were spray-painted in March on 10 graves in a Christian cemetery in Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood. Police continued to investigate but had not made any arrests by the end of the reporting period.

According to a reputable Jewish organization in Israel, recent years have seen an increase in anti-Semitic graffiti in outlying immigrant towns. The organization at-

tributes these acts to “disaffected” immigrant youth rather than to individuals motivated by anti-Semitic beliefs.

Advancement of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s controversial plan to withdraw all citizens from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the northern West Bank caused tensions in Israeli society between supporters and opponents of the plan, the latter often being members of religious Zionist groups. During the year, a rabbi issued a religious edict permitting settlers to physically harm Bedouin and Druze soldiers who participate in the evacuation of settlements pursuant to Sharon’s plan. In response to the edict, a Bedouin Sheikh urged Bedouin soldiers to respond forcefully, including with live fire, to any settler attacks against them during the evacuation.

Death threats in various forms, including graffiti, have been made against government officials who support the disengagement plan, including against Prime Minister Sharon. During a March 2005 sermon, Shas party spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef suggested that God would see that Sharon dies for implementing disengagement. The national office of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) issued a public statement condemning Yosef’s sermon for its inflammatory language and his subsequent apology as inadequate. Neo-Nazi graffiti was sprayed on monuments honoring, and actual gravesites of, several well-known Israeli historical figures, including the grave of the country’s first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion. In May 2005, swastikas and graffiti comparing Prime Minister Sharon to Adolf Hitler were sprayed on the road leading into the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem. A reputable Jewish organization attributed these acts to extremist opponents of Prime Minister Sharon’s disengagement plan. In April 2005, police discovered two fake bombs in Jerusalem and arrested two far-right religious activists with planting those bombs and others, in their efforts to distract government attention from the disengagement plan.

In February 2005, Druze rioters damaged a Melkite Catholic church and damaged or burned dozens of Christian businesses, homes, and cars in the northern village of Mughar after a Druze falsely claimed that Christian youths had placed pornographic pictures of Druze girls on the Internet. Eight persons were reported injured, and many Christians fled the city and refused to allow their children to return to school for weeks in the aftermath of the violence. Druze religious leaders were quick to denounce the riots, and representatives of the Christian community criticized the Government for not responding more quickly to the violence. In June 2005, the Government announced the allocation of \$2 million (NIS 10 million) in state funds to compensate residents for damaged property incurred during the riots.

Numerous NGOs in the country are dedicated to promoting Jewish-Arab coexistence and interfaith understanding. Their programs include events to increase productive contact between religious groups and to promote Jewish-Arab dialogue and cooperation. These groups and their events have had varying degrees of success. Interfaith dialogue often is linked to the peace process between the country and its Arab neighbors. Among efforts in this area are those of participants in the Alexandria Interfaith Peace Process, initiated at a 2002 interfaith conference in Cairo. Canon Andrew White, the Archbishop of Canterbury’s special representative to the Alexandria Process, convened meetings in December 2004 and in January 2005 in Jerusalem with Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders to discuss advancing the Alexandria Process. The group discussed ways to advance an agenda of peace among religious leaders in their respective communities. In January, as part of the Alexandria Process, Israeli rabbis and Israeli and Palestinian imams joined a group of more than 100 imams and rabbis from all over the world in a Brussels conference aimed at enhancing interfaith understanding and combating violence.

Animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the period covered by this report. Non-Orthodox Jews have complained of discrimination and intolerance by members of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups. Persons who consider themselves Jewish but who are not considered Jewish under Orthodox law particularly complained of discrimination. As in past years, ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem threw rocks at passing motorists driving on the Sabbath.

A variety of NGOs exists that seek to build understanding and create dialogue between religious groups and between religious and secular Jewish communities. Several examples are the Geshar Foundation (Hebrew for “bridge”); Meitarim, which operates a pluralistic Jewish-oriented school system; and the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, which promotes interfaith dialogue among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian institutions.

Throughout society, attitudes toward missionary activities and conversion generally are negative. Many Jews are opposed to missionary activity directed at Jews, and some are hostile toward Jewish converts to Christianity. Media sources reported that the Messianic Jewish community accused Yad L’achim, a Jewish religious organization opposed to missionary activity, of harassing its members. Christian and

Muslim Israeli-Arab religious leaders complain that missionary activity that leads to conversions frequently disrupts family coherence in their communities.

A March 2005 dispute over the sale of property in Jerusalem's Old City owned by the Greek Orthodox Church to Jewish investors ended with senior Orthodox leaders calling for the removal of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Irineos I. At the end of the reporting period, Patriarch Irineos had not resigned, but many Greek Christians in the country reject his authority.

Politicians, media outlets, and many ordinary citizens criticized the Government's practice of granting military draft exemptions and living allowances to full-time yeshiva students. In February 2004, due to political and societal pressures, the Government appointed a parliamentary committee to investigate ways to broaden military service to include yeshiva students. At the end of the reporting period, the committee had not issued its recommendations.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy consistently raised issues of religious freedom with the Foreign Ministry, the police, the Prime Minister's office, and other government agencies.

Embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, routinely meet with religious officials. These contacts include meetings with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze leaders at a variety of levels. In April 2005, the Embassy invited two Knesset members from the secular Shinui party and two from the ultra-Orthodox Shas party to participate together in an International Visitors Program on the U.S. legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government. The program received positive media coverage for enhancing understanding and ties between these two rival parties.

In October 2004, a representative from the Office of International Religious Freedom visited Israel and met with Government officials, Jewish religious leaders, civil rights NGO representatives, Israeli-Arab human rights advocates, and Christian clergy and religious workers—particularly those negatively impacted by construction of the separation barrier.

In November 2004, the Embassy hosted, as it has in recent years, an Iftar to commemorate the Muslim holiday of Ramadan, inviting more than 80 Israeli Muslim representatives from the political, economic, legal, religious, and business communities, as well as representatives of interfaith organizations. The dinner promoted understanding and cooperation between Jews, Muslims, and Christians, and enhanced U.S. understanding of issues affecting these religious communities.

The Embassy provided grants to local organizations promoting interfaith dialogue and coexistence and to organizations examining the role of religion in resolving conflict. For example, a grant facilitated the Alexandria Process, an interfaith dialogue between Christian, Muslim and Jewish spiritual leaders on furthering tolerance and nonviolence in their respective communities. Part of the grant funds publications and curriculum development for religious tolerance and coexistence in the Israeli school system.

The Embassy provided a grant to support a program for a dozen Palestinian youths and 20 Israeli-Jewish and Israeli-Arab youths to hold an October dialogue/retreat on "Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Youth Leadership."

Embassy officials maintain a dialogue with NGOs that follow human and civil rights issues, including religious freedom. Embassy representatives also attended and spoke at meetings of such organizations, including the Arab Association for Human Rights, the Mossawa Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Israel Religious Action Center, and Adalah.

THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (INCLUDING AREAS SUBJECT TO THE JURISDICTION OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY)

Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem during the 1967 War. Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) now administer the West Bank and Gaza Strip to varying extents. The PA does not have a constitution; however, the Basic Law provides for freedom of religion, and the PA generally respects this right in practice. The Basic Law names Islam as the official religion but also calls for "respect and sanctity" for other religions.

There was no change in the status of the PA's respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. President Mahmud Abbas took steps to eliminate religious incitement, although incidents of such incitement still occurred. In previous years, there were credible reports that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with criminal elements to extort property illegally from Christian landowners in the

Bethlehem area. While there have not been recent reports of Christians being targeted for extortion or abuse, the PA has not taken action to investigate past injustices allegedly perpetrated by PA officials.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal control in the occupied territories. Israel has no constitution; however, Israeli law provides for freedom of worship, and the Israeli Government generally respects this right in practice in the occupied territories.

There was no change in the status of the Israeli Government's respect for religious freedom in the occupied territories during the reporting period. Israel's strict closure policies frequently restricted the ability of Palestinians to reach places of worship and practice their religions. The construction of a separation barrier by the Government of Israel, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, also severely limited access to mosques, churches, and other holy sites, and seriously impeded the work of religious organizations that provide education, healthcare, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians. Such impediments were not exclusive to religious believers or to religious organizations, and at times the Israeli Government made efforts to lessen the impact on religious communities. The Israeli Government confiscated land (usually offering limited compensation, which churches do not accept) belonging to several religious institutions to build its separation barrier between East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

There generally are amicable relations between Christians and Muslims, although tensions exist. Strong societal attitudes are a barrier to conversions from Islam. Relations between Jews and non-Jews, as well as among the different branches of Judaism, sometimes are strained. Societal tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; such tensions remained high during the reporting period. The violence that has occurred since the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000 has significantly curtailed religious practice in many areas of the occupied territories. This violence included severe damage to places of worship and religious shrines in the occupied territories.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The occupied territories are composed of the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. The Gaza Strip covers an area of 143 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 million persons, not including approximately 7,800 Israeli settlers. The West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) covers an area of 2,238 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.4 million persons, not including approximately 220,000 Israeli settlers. East Jerusalem covers an area of 27 square miles, and its population is approximately 400,000 persons, including approximately 180,000 Israeli settlers. The Golan Heights covers an area of approximately 810 square miles, and its total population is approximately 20,000.

Approximately 98 percent of Palestinian residents of the occupied territories are Sunni Muslims. According to a 1997 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics estimate, approximately 39,560 Palestinian Christians live in the occupied territories. However, according to the sum of estimates provided by individual Christian denominations (which seem significantly overstated), the total number of Christians is approximately 200,000. A majority of Christians are Greek Orthodox (approximately 120,000), and there also are a significant number of Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics (approximately 50,000 together), Protestants, Syrian Orthodox, Armenians, Copts, Maronites, and Ethiopian Orthodox. In general Christians are concentrated in the areas of Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. According to municipal officials in Bethlehem, since 2002 approximately 2800 Christians from the Bethlehem area have left the occupied territories for other countries. According to Christian leaders, most of the Christians left their homes not due to religious discrimination, but for economic and security reasons associated with the violence of the Second Intifada, the restrictions resulting from Israeli closure policies and the construction of the Israeli separation barrier, and the negative impact of both on the local economy. There is also a community of approximately 400 Samaritans (an ancient offshoot of Judaism) located on Mount Gerazim near Nablus in the West Bank.

Adherents of several denominations of evangelical Christians as well as members of Jehovah's Witnesses operate in the West Bank. Foreign missionaries operate in the occupied territories, including a small number of evangelical Christian pastors who seek to convert Muslims to Christianity. While they maintain a generally low profile, the PA is aware of their activities and generally does not restrict them.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Palestinian Authority does not have a constitution; however, the Basic Law provides for religious freedom, and the PA generally respects this right in practice. The Basic Law states that "Islam is the official religion in Palestine," and that "respect and sanctity of all other heavenly religions (i.e., Judaism and Christianity) shall be maintained." In 2002 the Basic Law was approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and signed by then-PA Chairman Yasir Arafat. The March 2003 draft constitution states that "Islam is the official religion of the State," and "Christianity and all other monotheistic religions shall be equally revered and respected." It is unclear whether the injunction to "respect" other religions will translate into an effective legal protection of religious freedom. The Basic Law states that the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are "the main source of legislation," while the draft constitution states that Shari'a is "a major source of legislation."

Churches in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza operate under one of three general categories: churches recognized by the status quo agreements reached under Ottoman rule in the late 19th century, Protestant and evangelical churches established between the late 19th century and 1967, which, although they exist and operate, are not recognized officially by the PA, and a small number of churches that became active within the last decade, and whose legal status is more tenuous.

The first group of churches is governed by 19th century status quo agreements reached with Ottoman authorities, which the PA respects, and which specifically established the presence and rights of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Assyrian, Syrian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Coptic, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches. The Episcopal and Lutheran churches were added later to this list. The PA immediately upon its establishment recognized these churches and their rights. Like Shari'a courts under Islam, these religious groups are permitted to have ecclesiastical courts whose rulings are considered legally binding on personal status issues and some land issues. Civil courts do not adjudicate on such matters.

According to the PA, no other churches have applied for official recognition; however, churches in the second category, which includes the Assembly of God, Nazarene Church, and some Baptist churches, have unwritten understandings with the PA based on the principles of the status quo agreements. They are permitted to operate freely and are able to perform certain personal status legal functions, such as issuing marriage certificates.

The third group of churches consists of a small number of proselytizing churches, including Jehovah's Witnesses and some evangelical Christian groups. These groups have encountered opposition in their efforts to obtain recognition, both from Muslims who oppose their proselytizing, and from Christians who fear that the new arrivals may disrupt the status quo. However, these churches generally operate unhindered by the PA.

In practice the PA requires Palestinians to declare religious affiliation on identification papers. All personal status legal matters must be handled in either Islamic or Christian ecclesiastical courts if such courts exist for the individual's denomination. All legally recognized individual sects are empowered to adjudicate personal status matters, and in practice most do so. Neither the PA nor the Government of Israel currently has a civil marriage law. Legally, members of one religious group mutually may agree to submit a personal status dispute to a different Christian denomination to adjudicate, but in practice this does not occur. Churches that are not officially recognized by the PA or the Government of Israel must obtain special permission to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status issues; however, in practice non-recognized churches advise their members to marry (or divorce) abroad.

Since Islam is the official religion of the PA, Islamic institutions and places of worship receive preferential treatment. The PA has a Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs, which pays for the construction and maintenance of mosques and the salaries of many Palestinian imams. The Ministry also provides limited financial support to some Christian clergymen and Christian charitable organizations. The PA does not provide financial support to any Jewish institutions or holy sites in the occupied territories.

The PA requires that religion be taught in PA schools, with separate courses for Muslim and Christian students. A compulsory curriculum requires the study of Christianity for Christian students and Islam for Muslim students in grades one through six. While the PA has taken several steps to eliminate incitement in textbooks and teaching, Israeli NGO analysts at Palestinian Media Watch report that textbooks still de-legitimize Israel's historical connection to the land, and that many teachers still use inflammatory anti-Israel rhetoric in the classroom.

The PA does not officially sponsor interfaith dialogue; however, it sends representatives to meetings on improving interreligious relations and attempts to foster goodwill among Muslim and Christian religious leaders. The PA makes an effort to maintain good relations with the Christian community; however, the PA has not taken sufficient action to remedy past harassment and intimidation of Christian residents of Bethlehem by the city's Muslim majority. In previous years, PA officials appear to have been complicit in property extortion of Palestinian Christian residents. PA President Abbas has informal advisors on Christian affairs. Six seats in the 88-member Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) are reserved for Christians and one seat is reserved for Samaritans; there are no seats reserved for members of any other faith. The PA observes several religious holidays, including Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Zikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiya, Christmas, and the Birth of the Prophet. Christians also may observe the Easter holiday.

Israel has no constitution; however, Israeli law provides for freedom of worship, and the Israeli Government generally respects this right in practice in the occupied territories. Israel exercises varying degrees of legal control in the occupied territories. The international community considers Israel's authority in the occupied territories to be subject to the 1907 Hague Regulations and the 1949 Geneva Convention relating to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War. The Israeli Government considers the Hague Regulations applicable and maintains that it largely observed the Geneva Convention's humanitarian provisions. The Israeli Government applies Israeli law to East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, areas that it annexed after 1967.

The Israeli Government gives preferential treatment to Jewish residents of the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, when granting permits for home building and civic services. For example, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem pay the same taxes as Jewish residents, but Palestinian residents receive significantly fewer municipal services than Jewish residents. Many of the national and municipal policies enacted in Jerusalem are designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem. These are official policies that every Jerusalem municipal government has acknowledged and followed since 1967, and that Israeli ministers including current Israeli Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz have at times openly admitted. According to Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations, the Israeli Government uses a combination of zoning restrictions on building for Palestinians, confiscation of Palestinian lands, and demolition of Palestinian homes to "contain" non-Jewish neighborhoods.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Haram al-Sharif ("Noble Sanctuary," known to Jews as the Temple Mount), containing the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, has been, with all of East Jerusalem, under Israeli security control since 1967, when Israel captured the city (East Jerusalem was formally annexed in 1980, and thus Israel applies its laws to East Jerusalem). The Haram al-Sharif is administered, however, by the Islamic Waqf, the PA-affiliated but Jordanian-funded Muslim religious trust for East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Israeli police control the compound's entrances, and have the ability to limit access to the compound. The Waqf can object to entrance of particular persons, such as non-Muslim religious radicals, or to prohibited activities, such as prayer by non-Muslims or disrespectful clothing or behavior, but lacks authority to remove anyone from the site, and thus must rely on Israeli police to enforce site regulations. In practice, Waqf officials say that police often allow religious radicals (such as Jews seeking to rebuild the Temple on the site and to remove the mosques) and immodestly dressed persons to enter and often are not responsive to enforcing the site's rules.

While non-Muslims (except guests of the Waqf) were not allowed to enter the Haram al-Sharif from September 28, 2000 (the date of then-candidate for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's riot-inducing ascent to the Haram) until August 2003, non-Muslims can now visit the site during designated visiting hours. The Israeli Government, as a matter of stated policy, has prevented non-Muslims from worshipping at the Haram al-Sharif since 1967. Israeli police consistently have declined to allow obvious prayer on public safety grounds and publicly have indicated that this policy has not changed in light of the renewed visits of non-Muslims to the compound or the court ruling on the issue. Waqf officials contend that the Israeli police, in contravention of their stated policy and the religious status quo, have allowed members of radical Jewish groups to enter and to worship at the site. Spokesmen for these groups have confirmed successful attempts to pray inside the compound in interviews with the Israeli media. The Waqf interprets police actions as part of an Israeli policy to incrementally reduce Waqf authority over the site and to give non-Muslims rights of worship in parts of the compound.

Since October 2000, the Government of Israel, citing security concerns, has prevented most Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza from reaching the Haram al-Sharif, the third holiest shrine in Islam, by prohibiting their entry into Jerusalem. Restrictions are often placed on entry into the Haram al-Sharif even for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, such as a frequently-implemented restriction on males under the age of 45.

There are also disputes between the Muslim administrators of the Haram al-Sharif and Israeli authorities regarding Israeli restrictions on Waqf attempts to carry out repairs and physical improvements on the compound and its mosques. Palestinian workers under direction of Jordanian engineers are currently working on restoring tiles on the Dome of the Rock and Ottoman-era stones on the southern and eastern walls of the compound. Israeli authorities have prevented the Waqf from conducting several improvement projects or removing debris from the site, alleging that the Waqf is attempting to alter the nature of the site or to discard antiquities of Jewish origin.

Personal status law for Palestinians is based on religious law. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from Shari'a, and various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status issues for Christians. A 1995 PA presidential decree stipulated that all laws in effect before the advent of the PA would continue in force until the PA enacted new laws or amended the old ones. Therefore, in the West Bank, which was formerly under Jordanian rule, the Shari'a-based Jordanian Status Law of 1976 governs women's status issues. Under the law, which includes inheritance and marriage laws, women inherit less than male members of the family. The marriage law allows men to take more than one wife, although few do so. Prior to marriage, a woman and man may stipulate terms in the marriage contract that govern financial and child custody matters in the event of divorce. Reportedly, few women utilize this section of the law. Personal status law in Gaza is based on Shari'a-centered law as interpreted in Egypt; however, similar versions of the attendant restrictions on women described above apply as well.

Due to the increased violence and security concerns related to the Intifada, the Israeli Government has imposed a broad range of strict closures and curfews in the occupied territories since October 2000. These restrictions largely continued during the reporting period and resulted in significantly impeded freedom of access to places of worship for Muslims and Christians.

In 2002, the Government of Israel, citing security concerns, began constructing a barrier in the occupied territories to separate most of the West Bank from Israel, East Jerusalem, and Israeli settlement blocks. Construction of the barrier has involved confiscation of property owned by non-Jews, displacement of Christian and Muslim residents, and tightening of restrictions on freedom of access to places of worship for non-Jewish communities. The Government of Israel asserts that it has mechanisms to compensate landowners for all takings, but the Consulate General has received several reports of land being taken along the barrier's route without compensation under the Absentee Property Statute or military orders.

Construction of the separation barrier continued in and around East Jerusalem during the reporting period, restricting access by Arab Muslims and Christians, including Israeli Arabs as well as Palestinians who possess Jerusalem ID cards, to holy sites in Jerusalem and in the West Bank. The barrier also negatively affected access to schools, healthcare providers, and other humanitarian services, although in some cases, the Government made efforts to lessen the impact on religious institutions.

The separation barrier has made it difficult for Bethlehem-area Christians to reach the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, and it makes visits to Christian sites in Bethany and in Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who live on the Israeli side of the barrier, further fragmenting and dividing this small minority community. Foreign pilgrims sometimes also experience difficulty in obtaining access to Christian holy sites in the West Bank. The barrier and its checkpoints also impede the movement of clergy between Jerusalem and West Bank churches and monasteries, as well as the movement of congregations between their homes and places of worship.

In February 2003, the Government of Israel issued confiscation orders for land in Bethlehem to build a barrier and military positions around Rachel's Tomb (a shrine holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims). This barrier would leave the shrine on the "Israeli" side of the separation barrier. By the end of 2004, the Government of Israel had walled off and fortified the Rachel's Tomb area, and often restricted access to the site, only allowing Jewish visitors regular, unimpeded access and requiring prior coordination by other worshippers. In previous years, Jewish tourists visiting the shrine occasionally had been harassed by Palestinians, but Israel's closure of the area and associated land expropriations impede Muslim/Christian access to the site.

Israeli settlers have obtained ownership of some of the land and properties around the tomb through a disputed land deal.

In 2003, the Government of Israel confiscated land from the Baron Deir monastery in Bethlehem, which belongs to the Armenian Patriarchate, for construction of an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) patrol road in the area. Negotiations between the Patriarchate and the Government of Israel reduced the amount of land confiscated.

The Armenian Patriarchate also reports that the IDF caused significant damage to the property during IDF incursions into Bethlehem in 2002. The parties have not reached agreement on compensation for this damage.

Since 2003, the Israeli Government has confiscated land (with some compensation generally offered but refused) belonging to three Catholic institutions in Bethany for construction of the separation barrier: the Camboni Sisters Convent, the Passionist Monastery, and the Sisters of Charity Convent and school. Construction of the barrier in this area, which was largely completed during the reporting period, involved confiscation of a significant portion of each church property. In the village of Bethpage on the Mount of Olives, the Israeli Government built an 8-meter-high concrete separation barrier that crosses into the property of several Christian institutions. The barrier in Bethpage blocks the annual Orthodox Palm Sunday procession from Lazarus' Tomb in Bethany to the Old City of Jerusalem, but Israel has constructed a special gate to allow foreign pilgrims and Christians living on the Israeli side of the barrier to participate in the procession.

Israeli closure policies, imposed according to the Israeli Government due to security concerns, prevented tens of thousands of Palestinians from reaching places of worship in Jerusalem and the West Bank, including during religious holidays such as Ramadan, Christmas, and Easter. There have been several violent clashes between Israeli police and Muslim worshippers on the Haram al-Sharif, which Waqf officials allege have been due to the large police contingent kept on the site. On a few occasions, Muslim worshippers have thrown stones at police and police have fired tear gas and stun grenades at worshippers. Muslim worshippers also have held demonstrations at the site to protest reported Jewish extremist plans to damage the mosques or create a Jewish worship area at the site. Israeli security officials and police have generally been proactive and effective in dealing with such threats. In previous reporting periods there were some incidents of Muslims throwing rocks toward Jewish worshippers on the Western Wall plaza, but there have not been any recent incidents of rocks thrown near the Western Wall.

The Israeli Government's closure policy prevented several Palestinian religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, from reaching their congregations. In previous years, several clergymen reported that they were subject to harassment at checkpoints; however, during the reporting period there were no reports of serious harassment of clergy.

During the reporting period, Palestinian violence against Israeli settlers prevented some Israelis from reaching Jewish holy sites in the occupied territories, such as Joseph's Tomb near Nablus and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Since early 2001, following the outbreak of the Intifada, the Israeli Government has prohibited Israeli citizens in unofficial capacities from traveling to the parts of the West Bank under the civil and security control of the PA. This restriction prevented Israeli Arabs from visiting Muslim and Christian holy sites in the West Bank, and it prevented Jewish Israelis from visiting other sites, including an ancient synagogue in Jericho. There are now joint PA-Israeli plans, however, to resume Jewish visits to the Jericho synagogue.

Settler violence against Palestinians prevented some Palestinians from reaching holy sites in the occupied territories. Settlers in Hebron have in past years forcibly prevented Muslim muezzins from reaching the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs to sound the call to prayer, and have harassed Muslim worshippers in Hebron. Settler harassment of Palestinian Muslims in Hebron was a regular occurrence in this reporting period. The Government of Israel did not effectively respond to settler-initiated blocking of religious sites.

While there are no specific restrictions placed on Palestinians making the Hajj, all Palestinians faced closures and long waits at Israeli border crossings, which often impeded travel for religious purposes. Palestinians generally are not allowed to use Ben-Gurion airport to travel to Egypt or Jordan, and there are no direct air links from Israel to Saudi Arabia (Israel and Saudi Arabia do not have diplomatic relations). If residents of the occupied territories obtain a Saudi Hajj visa, they must travel by ground to Amman (for West Bankers) or Egypt (for Gazans) and then by ground, sea, or air to Jeddah.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, some Christian groups report that the Government of Israel failed to grant new visas to or renew existing visas for 38 Christian clergy ministering in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. While religious leaders say that there is still a problem with clergy visas, there has been significant improvement in this area in the past year. Catholic and Orthodox priests and nuns and other religious workers often from Syria and Lebanon faced long delays, and sometimes denied applications, entirely without explanation; however, the Israeli Government claimed that delays were due to security processing for visas and extensions.

In July 2003, during construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank town of Abu Dis, Israeli authorities damaged the ruins of a sixth-century Byzantine monastery. Officials of the Israel Antiquities Authority publicly accused the Defense Ministry of ignoring repeated warnings about the archaeological value of the site, and they charged that excavations for the barrier had damaged one-third of the Byzantine remains. At the end of the reporting period, neither the Defense Ministry nor the Antiquities Authority had repaired the site.

On June 13 2003, the day that Muslims celebrated the Birth of the Prophet Muhammed, IDF personnel closed the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron in violation of the Hebron Protocol, which states that the mosque should be available to Muslim worshipers on Muslim holidays. On June 24, 2003 (and in subsequent orders still in effect in 2005), Israeli officers issued a new order preventing the muezzin at the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron from sounding the call to prayer when Jews were praying in their portion of the shrine.

The Government of Israel generally has not compensated churches for damage incurred during past military operations. Sites damaged in 2002 for which no compensation was paid include St. Mary's Convent, the chapel at Bethlehem University, the Lutheran Church and orphanage in Beit Jala, the Latin Convent in Beit Sahour, the Bethlehem Bible College, a Syrian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Pilgrim's House, and the Omar Ibn al-Khattab Mosque. Both the ninth century al-Khader Mosque in Nablus, reputed to be the oldest mosque in the occupied territories, and the church of Mar Mitri, the oldest Christian church in Nablus, were destroyed. There were no reports of major damage to religious sites in the occupied territories during this reporting period. At the end of this reporting period, there had been no compensation paid for destroyed holy sites.

There were no reports of major damage to Christian churches during this reporting period. In previous years, there were credible reports that the Israeli military caused significant damage to church property. In January 2003, the IDF fired a missile that penetrated the roof of St. Philip's Episcopal Church in the Gaza Strip and exploded inside. The explosion created a 1.5-meter crater near the altar and shattered all the stained glass windows and chandeliers. Church officials filed a claim with the IDF for compensation, but never received a response. At the end of the reporting period, the Church was not repaired and remained unusable. The IDF acknowledged the incident, claiming it was an accident that occurred while fighting militants. The IDF generally does not compensate religious groups for damage that allegedly occurred during combat operations.

In previous years, the PA failed to halt several cases of seizures of Christian-owned land in the Bethlehem area by criminal gangs. In many cases, criminal gangs reportedly used forged land documents to assert ownership of lands belonging to Christians. Police failed to investigate most of these cases. In two cases, police arrested and then released the suspects on bail and allowed them to continue occupying the land in question. Local religious and political leaders confirmed that no such attempts to seize Muslim-owned land took place.

There were credible reports in previous years that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with members of these gangs to seize land from Christians. In one reported case, a PA judge openly told a Palestinian Christian landowner that he and his partners in the PA intelligence services required a substantial bribe to allow the landowner to remain on his property. PA officials repeatedly promised Christian leaders that they would take action in these cases, but by the end of the reporting period, no action had been taken.

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

Forced Religious Conversions

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

During the reporting period, the Palestinian terrorist groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad carried out several terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians. In January 2004, 11 persons were killed and over 50 injured in a suicide bombing aboard a bus in Jerusalem. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack. While these attacks were usually carried out in the name of Palestinian nationalism, some of the rhetoric used by terrorist organizations such as Hamas also included expressions of anti-Semitism.

A small number of Jewish settlers affiliated with the extremist group Kach were arrested for assaulting Palestinians and destroying Palestinian property; however, most incidents of violence or property destruction reportedly committed by settlers against Palestinians did not result in arrests or convictions.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There generally are amicable relations between Christians and Muslims, although tensions exist. Relations between Jews and non-Jews, as well as among the different branches of Judaism, often are strained. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as Israel's control of access to sites holy to Christians and Muslims. Some non-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem have complained of discrimination and intolerance on the part of some Orthodox Jews.

Societal attitudes continued to be a barrier to conversions, especially for Muslims converting to Christianity. In previous years, there were reports that some Christian converts from Islam who publicized their religious beliefs were harassed or ostracized by their families or villages.

Muslim-Christian tension has been minimal during this reporting period, and the few instances of Muslim-Christian violence seem related to social or inter-family conflicts rather than religious disputes. Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians have accused Israeli officials of attempting to foster animosity among Palestinians by exaggerating reports of Muslim-Christian tensions.

Interfaith romance is a sensitive issue. Most Christian and Muslim families in the occupied territories encourage their children—especially their daughters—to marry within their respective faiths. Couples who challenge this societal norm have encountered considerable societal and familial opposition. For example, there were reports of some Christian women receiving death threats from Christian family members and community leaders for marrying Muslim men during the reporting period.

In October 2004, a yeshiva student spat at the Armenian archbishop of Jerusalem while he was engaged in a religious procession through the Old City. The student was arrested and ordered to remain away from the Old City for 75 days. He also made a formal apology. The Holy See and the country's Chief Rabbinate issued a joint condemnation of the assault at the end of a meeting of Catholic and Jewish officials near Rome shortly after the incident. There have been several other spitting incidents in this reporting period, usually involving Armenian clergy due to their proximity to several Jewish Quarter yeshivas. The Mayor of Jerusalem, the Chief Rabbinate and the heads of several yeshivas have strongly criticized such behavior and punished those involved. The Armenian Patriarchate is satisfied with measures that the GOI, Municipality and yeshivas have taken after these incidents, but believes that more education on tolerance and respect for other religions would be helpful.

A March 2005 dispute over the transfer of property in Jerusalem's Old City owned by the Greek Orthodox Church to Jewish investors ended with senior Orthodox leaders calling for the removal of the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, Irineos I. The sale enraged Palestinians, who see the deals as a betrayal of Palestinian parishioners by the mostly-Greek clergy, and fear that such purchases will affect the Palestinian claims on Jerusalem as the capitol of a future Palestinian state. At the end of the period covered by this report, Patriarch Irineos had been ousted from his position by the Orthodox synod of bishops, but had not resigned, claiming that proceedings against him were illegal. Jordan and the Palestinian Authority have rescinded official recognition of Irineos, but at the reporting period's end Israel still recognized him as Patriarch and kept a contingent of Israeli police inside the Greek Orthodox Monastery to protect him.

In general more-established Christian denominations have not welcomed less-established evangelical churches. During the reporting period, settlers from the Hebron area and the southern West Bank severely beat and threatened several international activists, including three from the Christian Peacemaker Teams that escort Palestinian children to school and that protect Palestinian families from settler abuse. While it is unclear whether the attackers' motives stemmed from religious

extremism as opposed to ultra-nationalism, the activists feel that local Israeli police did not actively pursue the suspects and oppose the Christian Peacemaker Teams' presence in Palestinian villages.

The strong correlation between religion, ethnicity, and politics in the occupied territories at times imbues the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a religious dimension. The rhetoric of some Jewish and Muslim religious leaders has been harsher since the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000.

In previous years, Muslims on the Haram al-Sharif threw stones at Jewish worshippers on the Western Wall plaza, leading to major police confrontations; however, there have not been any recent incidents of stone-throwing at the plaza.

The rhetoric of some Jewish and Muslim religious leaders was harsh and at times constituted an incitement to violence or hatred. For example, the PA-controlled television station broadcast statements by Palestinian political and spiritual leaders that resembled traditional expressions of anti-Semitism, such as Lebanese-produced programming that appeared related to the anti-Semitic forgery "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." Some prominent Israeli officials also made public anti-Muslim statements. Former Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Ze'ev Boim asked in 2003, "What can explain bloody terrorism? What is the essence of Islam in general and the Palestinians in particular? Is it insufficient cultural development or genetic defects?"

Israeli activists reported numerous examples in which PA television shows invoked messages that activists considered anti-Semitic or that attempted to delegitimize Jewish history in general. Israeli settler radio stations often depicted Arabs as subhuman and called for Palestinians to be expelled from the West Bank. Right-wing, pro-settler organizations such as Women in Green, and various Hebron-area publications, have published several cartoons that demonize Palestinians. Also, the sermons of some Muslim imams occasionally included anti-Semitic messages, such as a May 13 sermon delivered by Shaykh Ibrahim Mudayris that ran on PA television, in which he compared Jews (in the context of land conflicts) to "a virus, like AIDS."

There were instances of Jewish-nationalist extremists harassing Muslims. On several occasions, a group of Jewish-nationalist extremists known as the "Temple Mount Faithful" again attempted to force their way inside the wall enclosing the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. In addition, the same group periodically attempted to lay a cornerstone for the building of a new Jewish temple that would replace the Islamic Dome of the Rock shrine, an act that Muslims considered an affront.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem discusses religious freedom issues with the Palestinians, and the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv discusses religious freedom issues with the Government of Israel as part of its overall policy to promote human rights in the occupied territories. The Consulate General also maintains contacts with representatives of the Jerusalem Waqf—an Islamic trust and charitable organization that owns and manages large amounts of real estate, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem—as well as with the various Christian churches and Jewish communities in Jerusalem.

Consulate General officers regularly urged PA officials and religious leaders to end incitement in the Palestinian media and in public statements.

The U.S. Government helped mitigate the delay in granting visas to religious clerics in the occupied territories. The U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem regularly works with the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv to convey points of concern regarding visa issuance, and U.S. officials regularly meet with religious representatives to ensure that their legitimate grievances are reported and addressed.

The Consulate General investigates allegations of abuses of religious freedom. During the reporting period, the Consulate investigated a range of charges, including allegations of damage to places of worship, allegations of incitement, and allegations concerning access to holy sites. Consulate General officers met with representatives of the Bethlehem Christian community and traveled to the area to investigate charges of mistreatment of Christians by the PA. The Consulate General raised the issue of seizure of Christian-owned land in discussions with PA officials.

Since 2002 the U.S. Government has funded the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI) to conduct an evaluation of new Palestinian elementary and high school textbooks, and to develop materials and conduct teacher training to foster tolerance and remove anti-Semitic and prejudicial content from Palestinian classrooms.

In October 2004, a representative from the Office of International Religious Freedom visited Jerusalem and met with Government officials, NGO representatives,

Muslim waqf officials, and Christian clergy and religious workers, particularly those negatively impacted by construction of the separation barrier.

In several cases, the Israeli Government agreed to consider changes to the route of the barrier in Jerusalem near several Christian institutions and installed pedestrian gates in the barrier to facilitate the passage of priests and other religious workers. Three of these route changes were formalized by the end of the reporting period.

JORDAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, on condition that religious practices are consistent with “public order and morality;” however, the Government continued to impose restrictions on this right. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. A convert from Islam to Christianity was detained on the orders of a Shari’a court in September 2004 and charged with apostasy. In November, the Amman Shari’a Court found him guilty of apostasy, stripped him of his civil rights, and annulled his marriage. A Shari’a appellate court upheld the conviction in January 2005. Members of unrecognized religious groups and converts from Islam face legal discrimination and bureaucratic difficulties in personal status cases. Converts from Islam additionally risk the loss of civil rights. There is no statute that expressly forbids proselytizing Muslims. However, Shari’a courts have the authority to prosecute proselytizers.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Relations between Muslims and Christians generally are good; however, adherents of unrecognized religions and Muslims who convert to other faiths face societal discrimination.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall policy to promote human rights and interfaith dialogue and understanding.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,436 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.6 million. More than 95 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Official government figures estimate that Christians make up 4 percent of the population; however, government and Christian officials privately estimate the true figure to be closer to 3 percent. There also are at least 20,000 Druze, a small number of Shi’a Muslims, and fewer than 800 adherents of the Baha’i Faith. There are no statistics available regarding the number of atheists or persons who are not adherents of any religious faith.

Officially recognized Christian denominations include the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Assyrian, Anglican, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist, United Pentecostal, and Presbyterian churches. Other churches, including the Baptist Church, the Free Evangelical Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assembly of God, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance, are registered with the Ministry of Interior as “societies” but not as churches. Some Egyptian immigrants are adherents of the Coptic Church. There also are a number of Chaldean and Syriac Christians and Shi’a represented in the immigrant Iraqi population.

With few exceptions, there are no major geographic concentrations of particular religious groups. The cities of Husn, in the north, and Fuheis, near Amman, are predominantly Christian. Madaba and Karak, both south of Amman, also have significant Christian populations. The northern part of the city of Azraq has a sizeable Druze population, as does Umm Al-Jamal in the governorate of Mafraq. There also are Druze populations in Amman and Zarka and a smaller number in Irbid and Aqaba. There are a number of nonindigenous Shi’a living in the Jordan Valley and the south.

Foreign missionaries operating in the country include representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah’s Witnesses, Campus Crusade for Christ, Samaritan’s Purse, The Evangelical Alliance Mission, Life Agape, Intervarsity, Navigators, Christar, Arab World Ministries, Operation Mobilization, Southern Baptist International Mission Board, the Conservative Baptists, Frontiers, Brother Andrew, the Jesuits, Christian Brothers, Rosary Sisters, Benedictines, Anglican Church Mission Society, the Society of Friends (Quakers),

Comboni Sisters, Little Sisters of Jesus, the Religious of Nazareth, Sisters of St. Dorothy, the Daughters of Mary the Helper (Salesian Sisters), the Little Sisters of Nazareth, the Little Family of the Annunciation, Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, Basiliennes Chouerites, Focolare Sisters, Franciscans (OFM), Sons of Divine Providence (Don Oriane Fathers), Association Fraternal International (AFI), Institute of the Incarnate Word, Franciscans of the Cross, Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM), Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Daughters of Mary of the Enclosed Garden, Theresian Institute, and the Missionaries of Charity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, on condition that religious practices are consistent with “public order and morality;” however, the Government continued to impose restrictions on this right. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion.

The Constitution, in Articles 103–106, provides that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims are the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari’a Courts, which apply Shari’a law in their proceedings. Personal status includes religion, marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. Personal status law follows the guidelines of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is applied to cases that are not explicitly addressed by civil status legislation. Matters of personal status of non-Muslims are the jurisdiction of Tribunals of Religious Communities, according to Article 108.

While Christianity is a recognized religion and non-Muslim citizens may profess and practice the Christian faith, churches must be accorded legal recognition through administrative procedures to own land and perform marriages and other sacraments. The Prime Minister unofficially confers with an interfaith council of clergy representing officially registered local churches on all matters relating to the Christian community, including the registration of new churches. The Government refers to the following criteria when considering official recognition of Christian churches: the faith must not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; it must be recognized by the Middle East Council of Churches; the faith must not oppose the national religion; and the group must include some citizen adherents. Groups that the Government deems to engage in practices that violate the law and the nature of society or threaten the stability of public order are prohibited; however, there were no reports that any religious groups were banned.

Churches and other religious institutions that wish to receive official recognition must apply to the Prime Ministry for registration. Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent of the Government and are tax-exempt. Some churches were registered with the Ministry of Interior as “societies” rather than churches.

Religious instruction is mandatory for all Muslim students in public schools. Christian and Baha’i students are not required to attend courses in Islam, and Christian religious instruction is provided for Christian students in public schools. In the past, a local Orthodox priest complained that public schools did not provide a satisfactory curriculum for Christian students in lieu of Islamic studies. In 1996 the late King Hussein and the Ministry of Education approved religious instruction for Christian students in public schools. In 1998 the Government launched an experimental program in four districts to incorporate Christian education in the public school curriculum. However, this program has not progressed as planned. In public schools with a Christian population large enough to merit a Christian curriculum, several different denominations are usually present. While it is the responsibility of the various churches to design a program of instruction, they have not been able to agree on a common curriculum. The Constitution provides that congregations have the right to establish schools for the education of their own members “provided that they comply with the general provisions of the law and are subject to government control in matters relating to their curriculums and orientation.”

There are two major government-sponsored institutions that promote interfaith understanding: the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies and the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research (the Al al-Bayt Foundation). The last time the Government held an international Christian conference in government facilities was in 2002.

The Muslim feasts of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Birth of the Prophet, the Prophet’s Ascension, and the Islamic New Year are celebrated as national holidays. Christmas and the Gregorian calendar New Year also are national holidays. Easter

is a government-recognized holiday and Christians may request leave for other Christian feasts approved by the local Council of Bishops.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were no reports that the practice of any faith was prohibited; however, the Government does not officially recognize all religious groups. Some religious groups, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, faced societal and official discrimination. In addition, not all Christian denominations have applied for or been accorded legal recognition.

The Government does not recognize the Druze or Baha'i faiths as religions but does not prohibit their practice. The Druze face official discrimination but do not complain of social discrimination. Baha'is face both official and social discrimination. The Government does not record the bearer's religion as Druze or Baha'i on national identity cards; Druze are listed as Muslim, and Baha'i do not have any religion officially listed. The small Druze and Baha'i communities do not have their own courts to adjudicate personal status and family matters; such matters are heard in Shari'a courts. The Government does not officially recognize the Druze temple in Azraq, and four social halls belonging to the Druze are registered as "societies." The Government does not permit Baha'is to register schools or places of worship. Employment applications for government positions occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion.

The Government does not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but each denomination is allowed to conduct religious services and activities without interference.

The Government does not interfere with public worship by the country's Christian minority.

Because Shari'a law governs the personal status of Muslims, converting from Islam to Christianity and proselytizing Muslims are not allowed. Muslims who convert to other faiths face societal and governmental discrimination. The Government does not recognize the legality of such conversions. Under Shari'a, converts are regarded as apostates and legally may be denied their civil and property rights. In the past, this principle has not been applied, but during the reporting period one convert to Christianity was found guilty of apostasy and stripped of many of his civil rights. The Government claims it neither encourages nor prohibits apostasy. Converts from Islam do not fall under the jurisdiction of their new religion's laws in matters of personal status; they are still considered Muslims under Shari'a. Converts to Islam fall under the jurisdiction of Shari'a courts. Shari'a law prescribes the death penalty for Muslims who convert to another religion; however, such punishment has never been applied.

Government policy requires that foreign missionary groups (which the Government alleges to be unfamiliar with the customs and traditions of the indigenous society) refrain from public proselytizing to maintain the missionaries' safety and security with regards to members of society opposed to such practices. In the past, the Government has taken action against some Christian missionaries in response to the complaints of local Christian groups who charged that their activities disrupted the peace and cohesion of society.

Despite past difficulty in obtaining legal status, the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), a Christian training school for pastors and missionaries, was registered with the Government and currently operates as a cultural center. JETS is permitted to appoint faculty and administration, but as a consequence the Government denies accreditation. Students and faculty from abroad wishing to attend JETS were able to obtain residency through tourist visas; however, because of the lack of accreditation, visas were not guaranteed. Many students overstayed their visas and upon departure from the country were required to pay two dollars for each day they spent out of status. JETS is forbidden by the Government to accept students who are Muslim converts to Christianity. In the past, seven foreign students who had converted from Islam to Christianity were forced out of the program and asked to leave the country. The Government authorized JETS to own property, and in August 2003 they broke ground on a new facility.

Of the 110 seats in the Lower House of Parliament, 9 are reserved for Christians. No seats are reserved for Druze or adherents of other religious faiths. The parliamentary elections law historically has under-represented urban areas that are centers of support for Islamist candidates. The Islamic Action Front, the major Islamic party, participated in the June 2003 parliamentary elections and holds 17 of the 110 seats.

The Political Parties Law prohibits houses of worship from being used for political activity. The law was designed primarily to prevent government opponents from preaching politically oriented sermons in mosques.

In early 2000, radical Islamists criticized a poem published by Muslim poet Musa Hawamdeh, and the Government banned the book in which the poem was included. Based on provisions in the penal code, he was charged with the equivalent of a misdemeanor for insulting Islam. In July 2000, Hawamdeh, without retracting any portion of his poem, was acquitted in both the Shari'a and civil courts; however, because of technicalities the Shari'a court subpoenaed Hawamdeh again in 2001 for the same case in which he had already been acquitted. In May 2003, Hawamdeh was sentenced to 3 months in prison for apostasy. The Court of First Instance found that Hawamdeh had denied "undeniable facts from the Holy Qur'an." Hawamdeh immediately challenged the verdict, but in August 2003 the Appeals Court upheld the lower court's ruling. At the end of the reporting period, he remained free pending another appeal.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Trusts manages Islamic institutions and the construction of mosques. It also appoints imams, provides mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain activities sponsored by mosques. The Government monitors sermons at mosques and requires that speakers refrain from political commentary that could instigate social or political unrest.

In January 2003, the private weekly newspaper *Al Hilal* was shut down and three of its journalists were arrested and accused of "harming the dignity of Muslims" (blasphemy) by publishing an article about the Prophet Muhammed's sexual relationship with his wives, described in some legends. In February 2003, all three were found guilty, with the prison sentences of two journalists commuted to fines and the author sentenced to 6 months' incarceration. The newspaper has since resumed publication.

According to the Constitution, religious community trusts ("Awqaf") and matters of personal status such as religion, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Shari'a courts for Muslims and separate non-Muslim tribunals for each religious community recognized by the Government. There is no provision for civil marriage or divorce. The head of the department that manages Shari'a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari'a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. All judicial nominations are approved by the Prime Minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. The Protestant denominations registered as "societies" come under the jurisdiction of one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals assigned for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions such as the Druze and the Baha'i. Such individuals must request one of the recognized courts to hear their personal status cases.

Shari'a is applied in all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father, and all citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance.

All minor children of a male citizen who converts to Islam automatically are considered to be Muslim. Adult children of a male Christian who has converted to Islam become ineligible to inherit from their father if they do not convert to Islam. In cases in which a Muslim converts to Christianity the conversion is not recognized legally by the authorities, and the individual continues to be treated as a Muslim in matters of family and property law; his minor children also continue to be treated as Muslims under the law.

In 2002, the Shari'a and civil court systems adjudicated a dispute concerning custody of two minors, raised as Christians, whose father allegedly converted to Islam shortly before his death. The widow contends that her husband's signature on the conversion certificate is a forgery. The courts assigned legal custody to the Christian widow's brother, who is a convert to Islam. However, the children remained in the mother's physical custody pending the result of a counter suit she filed against her brother, alleging disinterest in the children and misuse of the children's trust funds. In April 2005, a court ruled in the mother's favor and assigned her legal custody of the children. In May, the widow's brother appealed against the ruling, but an appellate court rejected the petition.

Some Christians are unable to divorce under the legal system because they are subject to their faith's religious court system, which does not allow divorce. Many such individuals convert to another Christian denomination or to the Muslim faith to divorce legally.

Druze, Baha'is, and members of other unrecognized religions do not have their religious affiliations correctly noted on their national identity cards or "family books" (the family book is a national registration record that is issued to the head of every family and that serves as proof of citizenship). Atheists must associate themselves with a recognized religion for official identification purposes.

The Government traditionally reserves some positions in the upper levels of the military for Christians; however, all senior command positions traditionally have been reserved for Muslims. Division-level commanders and above are required to lead Islamic prayer on certain occasions. There is no Christian clergy in the military.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On September 13 2004, on the order of a Shari'a court, a convert from Islam to Christianity was arrested and held overnight on charges of apostasy. On November 23, a Shari'a court found the defendant guilty of apostasy. The ruling was reaffirmed on January 25, 2005 by a Shari'a appeals court. The verdict declared the convert to be a ward of the state, stripped him of his civil rights, and annulled his marriage. It further declared him to be without any religious identity. It stated that he lost all rights to inheritance, may not remarry his (now former) wife unless he returns to Islam, and forbade his being considered an adherent of any other religion. The verdict implies the possibility that legal and physical custody of his child could be assigned to someone else. The convert reportedly left the country with his family.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners who remained in custody at the end of the period covered by this report; however, in September 2004 the security services detained and released 11 unlicensed preachers, described in the press as Islamists. Such detentions were related to allegations of involvement in strictly political activities rather than religious affiliation or belief.

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. However, according to the law, the father of any child, whether Muslim or Christian, may restrict the child's travel. There are at least six U.S. citizen children of mixed-religion marriages residing in the country against the will of their U.S. citizen mothers. Under the law, such children are considered to bear the religion of their fathers.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In general, Christians did not suffer discrimination. Christians held high-level government and private sector positions and were represented in the media and academia approximately in proportion to their presence in the general population. Baha'is faced some societal discrimination.

The majority of the indigenous population view religion as central to one's personal identity. Relations between Muslims and Christians generally are amicable. However, Muslims who convert to other religions often face social ostracism, threats, and abuse from their families and Muslim religious leaders. Interfaith relationships, which ultimately may lead to conversion (either to the Muslim or Christian faiths), usually are strongly discouraged by the families. Such relationships may lead to ostracism and, in some cases, violence against the couple or feuds between members of the couple's families. When such situations arise, families may approach local government officials for resolution. In the past, there were reports that in some cases local government officials encouraged Christian women involved in relationships with Muslim men to convert to Islam to defuse potential family or tribal problems; however, during the period covered by this report, there were no known cases in which local officials harassed or coerced persons to convert from Christianity to Islam. In the past, a number of mixed-faith married couples sought to emigrate because of negative family and societal reactions to their marriages.

Anti-Semitic editorial cartoons, articles and opinion pieces, usually the expressions of political columnists, were published in the newspapers "Al-Rai" and "Al-Dustur." They were not common, but did occur without government response.

During the reporting period, a member of the royal family, Prince Hamza, hosted a conference that promoted interfaith dialogue among religious communities. The conference included religious leaders from numerous countries and focused on Islam as a faith with democracy principals. In November 2004, supported by the Government, the Grand Mufti issued a proclamation, stating that the "true nature" of Islam is one of moderation and tolerance. He encouraged the "silent majority" to promote Islam as a faith capable of building bridges of understanding between all nations.

In 2003, a number of Muslims and Christians founded the Jordan Interfaith Coexistence Research Center, which promotes interfaith dialogue both domestically and internationally. For instance, the Center was instrumental in organizing a trip of moderate Muslim clerics to the United States to meet with religious leaders from the three monotheistic faiths. During the reporting period, local newspapers occasionally published articles critical of Christian evangelical organizations.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials raised religious freedom and other human rights issues with government authorities on a number of occasions. Embassy officers met frequently with members of the various religious and missionary communities in the country, as well as with private religious organizations.

During the reporting period, the Embassy funded six American speakers to participate in a conference entitled, "Islam and Muslims in the 21st. Century." The Faculty of Shari'a and Islamic Studies at Yarmouk University hosted the conference. The Embassy also sponsored the participation of a prominent Shari'a judge in an international visitor program designed to promote interfaith dialogue. Embassy officers met with moderate Islamic political leaders dedicated to tolerance and religious dialogue. The Department of State instituted a multi-phase exchange program that will bring U.S. religious leaders to Jordan and Jordanian imams and other religious leaders to the United States for outreach activities aimed at grassroots communities and youth. The Embassy also sent a reporter who covers religious issues to the United States on an international visitor grant.

KUWAIT

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government placed some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the State shall protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is a main source of legislation.

There was some improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Government officials met with various religious groups in the country and held a conference to promote religious tolerance. The Ministry of Education continued to review a Shi'a request to strike anti-Shi'a comments from Islamic education textbooks and a Catholic petition to allow Catholics students to study the Catechism during the period allotted for Islamic studies. An Apostolic Nunciature, based in the country, continued to represent Vatican interests in the region.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 6,880 square miles, and its population is 2.8 million, of whom an estimated 2.1 million are Muslim, including nearly all 956,000 citizens. The remainder consists of approximately 1.8 million foreign workers and their families and 107,000 Bidoon (officially stateless) Arabs with residence ties to the country but who either have no documentation of or are unwilling to disclose their nationality. While the national census does not distinguish between Shi'a and Sunni adherents, the majority of citizens, including the ruling family, belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The Sunni Muslim population is approximately 1.7 million, 669,000 of whom are citizens. The remaining 30 percent of Muslim citizens (approximately 287,000) are Shi'a, as are approximately 100,000 noncitizen residents. Estimates of the Christian population range from 250,000 to 300,000 (including approximately 200 citizens, most of whom belong to 12 large families).

The Christian community includes: the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church with approximately 100 members (several thousand other Christians also use the Anglican Church for worship services); Armenian Orthodox Church with approximately 4,000 members; Coptic Orthodox Church with an estimated 65,000 members; Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church with approximately 2,000 members (Greek Catholics wor-

ship in a rented house, not at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait City); Greek Orthodox Church (referred to in Arabic as the Roman Orthodox Church, a reference to the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium) with an estimated 3,500 members; National Evangelical (Protestant) Church with 3 main congregations (Arabic, English, and Malayalee) and approximately 20,000 members (several other Christian denominations also worship at the National Evangelical Church compound); and the Roman Catholic Church, with 2 official churches and a third worship facility in a rented house, with an estimated 150,000 members (Latin, Maronite, Coptic Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Malabar, and Malankara congregations all worship at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait City).

There are many other unrecognized Christian denominations, totaling tens of thousands of members. These include: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Indian Orthodox Syrian Church, Mar Thoma, and Seventh-day Adventists.

There are also communities of Baha'is (estimated 400 adherents), Buddhists (estimated 100,000), Hindus (estimated 300,000), and Sikhs (approximately 10,000).

Missionary groups in the country serve non-Muslim congregations. The Government prohibits proselytizing Muslims.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government placed some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the State shall protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is a main source of legislation. The Government observes Islamic holy days.

The 1961 Press and Publications Law specifically prohibits the publication of any material that attacks religions or incites persons to commit crimes, create hatred, or spread dissension among the public. There are laws against blasphemy, apostasy, and proselytizing. These laws sometimes have been used to restrict religious freedom.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has official responsibility for overseeing religious groups. Officially recognized churches must deal with a variety of government entities, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (for visas and residence permits for pastors and other staff) and the Municipality of Kuwait (for building permits and land issues). While reportedly there is no official government list of recognized churches, seven Christian churches have at least some form of official recognition enabling them to operate openly. These seven churches have open files at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, allowing them to bring in pastors and staff to operate their churches.

Four denominations are widely understood to enjoy full recognition by the Government and are allowed to operate compounds officially designated as churches: Anglican, Coptic Orthodox, National Evangelical (Protestant), and Roman Catholic. However, they face quotas on the number of clergy and staff they can bring in to the country, and their existing facilities are inadequate to serve their respective communities.

The Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church has an open file at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. Greek Catholics worship in a rented house (two other Indian Catholic denominations also use the house for worship services).

The Armenian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox churches are allowed to operate openly, hire employees, invite religious speakers, and conduct other such activities without government interference; however, according to government records, their facilities are registered only as private homes. For example, the Armenian Orthodox Church rents a private house from a citizen and uses it for worship services and other religious purposes. No other churches or religions have legal status, but adherents generally are allowed to operate freely in private homes provided that they do not violate laws limiting public assembly or prohibiting proselytizing.

The procedures for registration and licensing of religious groups appear to be connected to those for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In 1993, the Council of Ministers ordered all unlicensed NGOs to cease activities, but this order has never been enforced. There are hundreds of unlicensed, informal NGOs, clubs, and civic groups in the country. Since 1985, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor has issued only 13 new NGO licenses, including 6 in May 2005. As of June, there were 174 NGO applications pending with the Ministry.

In February, the Government announced it would remove all street-side Islamic charity boxes out of concern that the lack of transparency of this kind of donation

made it difficult to monitor whether these funds were used to finance terror operations; removal was completed in March. All charitable contributions of licensed Islamic charities in the country now require Central Bank approval. There is a charitable organizations department within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor that is responsible for regulating religious charities based in the country by reviewing their applications for registration and monitoring their operations.

The Higher Advisory Committee on Completion of the Application of Islamic Shari'a Provisions is tasked with preparing society for the full implementation of Shari'a in all fields. The committee makes recommendations to the Amir on ways in which current laws can be brought into better conformity with Islamic Shari'a, but it has no authority to enforce such changes. The committee reviewed laws during the year related to the Penal Code and the Banking Code. The Constitution stipulates that Shari'a is a main source of legislation, but some Islamists would like to amend that to the only source of legislation.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Islamic New Year, Birth of the Prophet, Ascension of the Prophet, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

The Government requires Islamic religious instruction in public schools for all students.

In May, the Government, through the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, sponsored a conference on moderation and tolerance to reduce extremism and intolerance. Government officials continued to meet with Muslim leaders and the heads of various Christian denominations to promote interfaith understanding.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Shi'a are free to worship according to their faith without government interference, and the overall situation for Shi'a improved somewhat during the reporting period. However, members of the Shi'a community have expressed concern about the relative scarcity of Shi'a mosques due to the Government's slow approval of the construction of new mosques and the repair of existing ones. (There are approximately 36 Shi'a mosques compared with approximately 1,070 Sunni mosques in the country.) Since 2001, the Government has granted licenses for and has approved the construction of six new Shi'a mosques. Three mosques reportedly are under construction and scheduled to open in 2005.

There are approximately 650 Shi'a husseiniyas in the country, most of which are informal or unlicensed.

Family law is administered through religious courts. The Government permits Shi'a to follow their own jurisprudence in matters of personal status and family law at the first-instance and appellate levels. In 2003, the Government approved a long-standing Shi'a request to establish a Shi'a court of cassation (Supreme Court) to handle Shi'a personal status and family law cases at the highest judicial level. However, the court has not yet been established because there are no Shi'a (Ja'fari) judges for this level of jurisdiction. In November 2003, the Government publicly announced its approval of another long-standing Shi'a request for the establishment of an independent Shi'a (Ja'fari) waqf, an agency to administer religious endowments in accordance with the Ja'fari school of jurisprudence.

Shi'a who aspire to serve as imams are forced to seek appropriate training and education abroad (mainly in Iraq and Iran) due to the lack of Shi'a jurisprudence courses at Kuwait University's College of Islamic Law (Faculty of Shari'a). The Ministry of Education is reviewing a Shi'a application to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics. On January 22, a Shi'a leader called on the Ministry of Education to remove references declaring Shi'a as nonbelievers from high school Islamic education textbooks. Sunni scholars author the books, which are entirely based on the Sunni interpretation of Islam.

Shi'a remained under-represented in upper levels of government. In 2003, 5 Shi'a were elected to the 50-seat National Assembly, compared with 6 Shi'a in the previous assembly. The only Shi'a member of the Council of Ministers, Information Minister Muhammad Abdallah Abbas Abulhasan, resigned in January. In June, however, the Government appointed Dr. Ma'souma Al-Mubarak, a Shi'a and the first female Council member, as Minister of Planning and Minister of State for Administrative Development. There were no known Shi'a in the Kuwait State Security (KSS) forces.

In March 2004, the Government permitted Shi'a to stage a public reenactment of the Battle of Karbala depicting the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson. Kuwait TV, also for the first time, broadcast programs on the Shi'a religious holiday of Ashura; however, the Government denied a Shi'a request during the reporting period to hold the same reenactment.

During the reporting period, a number of liberal attorneys reported that the judicial system is dominated by Islamists who practice law with a heavy conservative

bias. In the judicial system, roughly half of the judges are noncitizens, mostly Egyptian. The noncitizen judges are on 1- to 3-year contracts that must be renewed in order for them to remain employed. Most of the noncitizen judges are trained in Shari'a law and not in the country's civil code, thereby increasing the likelihood of rulings based on religious interpretation.

The Anglican, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, National Evangelical, and Roman Catholic churches operate freely on their premises and hold worship services without government interference. Their leaders also state that the Government generally is supportive of their presence, even providing police security and traffic control as needed. Other Christian denominations (including Indian Orthodox, Mar Thoma, Mormons, and Seventh-day Adventists) are not recognized legally but are allowed to operate in rented villas, private homes, or in the facilities of recognized churches. Members of these congregations have reported that they are able to worship without government interference, provided that they do not disturb their neighbors nor violate laws regarding assembly and proselytizing. Churches outside of the four recognized denominations are prohibited from displaying exterior signage, including a cross or the congregation's name, or engaging in other public activities, such as ringing bells.

There were no reports that the Government engaged in anti-Semitic activity during the reporting period; however, there were incidents of unofficial anti-Semitic commentary from media pundits and by some mosque preachers. The Government has taken no action to enact laws to protect the religious freedom of Jews, although there is no significant Jewish community present. There have been past examples of anti-Semitic rhetoric, such as citing Qur'anic verses to denounce the political intentions of the Jewish people, in government-sponsored education curricula, specifically in reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Members of religions not sanctioned in the Qur'an, such as Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, may not build official places of worship since these religions lack legal status, but they are allowed to worship privately in their homes without government interference.

During the reporting period, there were no closures of Sikh house temples. The Sikh community was able to worship freely in a rented apartment designated for worship and in private homes. Sikhs also engaged in other religious activities, including public marriage and other celebrations, without government interference.

In 2003, the Government reportedly closed the file on the National Evangelical Church (NEC) due to the NEC's alleged failure to comply with the National Manpower Support Law by employing the requisite number of citizens. The Government reinstated the NEC's open file status by May 2004, and the Church was able to apply for and renew visas for pastors and staff; however, in accordance with the Law, the Government imposed substantial annual fines for every visa application or renewal submitted on behalf of noncitizen staff, in addition to routine visa and residency fees. Church leaders negotiated with government authorities to resolve the fine issue and exempt the Church from the law's "Kuwaitization" requirements. The issue was resolved during the reporting period, and fines are no longer being levied.

The Government prohibits missionaries from proselytizing among Muslims; however, they may serve non-Muslim congregations. The law prohibits organized religious education for religions other than Islam, although this law is not enforced rigidly. Informal religious instruction occurs inside private homes and on church compounds without government interference; however, there were reports that government inspectors from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs periodically visited public and private schools outside of church compounds to ensure that religious teaching other than Islam did not take place. During the reporting period, the Government still had not responded to the request from the Roman Catholic Church to permit Catholic students in certain private schools to study the Catechism separately during the period allotted for instruction in Islam.

The Roman Catholic Church faces severe overcrowding at its two official church facilities. Its cathedral in downtown Kuwait City regularly draws tens of thousands of worshippers to its more than 20 weekly services in several languages. Due to limited space on the compound, the Church is unable to construct any new buildings. The National Evangelical Church, which serves a weekly average of 20,000 worshippers in approximately 60 congregations, is also overcrowded. The Church is seeking approximately 15 to 20 acres of new land to alleviate overcrowding and petitioned the Government for additional land in 2004. As of May, the Government had not responded to the Church's request.

The Coptic Orthodox Church also faces challenges, such as overcrowding at its small compound in Kuwait City. In 2002, the Government notified the Church of its intention to reacquire the parcel of land on which the church is located for a road

expansion project. The following year, the Government granted the Church 6,500 square meters of new land in Hawally district to build a new place of worship; the Church had requested only 5,000 square meters. The Government has not offered any financial assistance to construct a new church, but municipal authorities provided a written commitment, in response to a church request, that it would not force the Church to vacate its current premises until a new facility was available. No date had been set for the church's relocation.

In December 2004, in the region of Jahra, a group of Salafi Islamists forced a well-known supermarket to remove Christmas trees and greeting cards from its shelves, claiming that holiday items connected to Christmas and New Year's celebrations were contrary to Islamic teachings. The group reportedly produced a petition with 350 signatures demanding the removal, explaining that allowing such goods to be available was haram (forbidden).

The Government does not permit the establishment of non-Islamic publishing companies or training institutions for clergy. Nevertheless, several churches publish religious materials for use solely by their congregations. Further, some churches, in the privacy of their compounds, provide informal instruction to individuals interested in joining the clergy.

A private company, the Book House Company Ltd., is permitted to import a significant number of Bibles and other Christian religious materials, including videotapes and compact discs, for use solely by the congregations of the country's recognized churches. The Book House Company Ltd. is the only bookstore that has an import license to bring in such materials, which also require approval by government censors. There have been reports of customs officials confiscating non-Islamic religious materials from private citizens upon their arrival at the airport. In 2003, police arrested five foreign workers for allegedly proselytizing with Bibles in Andalus district. State security officials later released the individuals on condition that they sign commitments pledging to refrain from proselytizing.

The Islam Presentation Committee (IPC), under the authority of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, actively encouraged proselytizing non-Muslims. The IPC maintained an office at the Central Prison to provide religious education and information to inmates. In late 2003, the IPC established the NGO Advocates of Western-Arab Relations and Exchange to promote awareness of Islam and understanding of Arab and Islamic culture, and to provide training courses to foreigners.

Although there is a small community of approximately 200 acknowledged Christian citizens, a 1980 law prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims; however, citizens who were Christians before 1980 are allowed to transmit their citizenship to their descendants.

The law forbids marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men. A non-Muslim female is not required by law to convert to Islam to marry a Muslim male. In practice, many non-Muslim women face strong economic and societal pressure to convert. Failure to convert may mean that, should the couple later divorce, the Muslim father would be granted custody of any children. A non-Muslim woman who fails to convert also is ineligible to inherit her husband's property or to be naturalized.

Women continue to experience legal and social discrimination. In the family courts, one man's testimony is sometimes given the same weight as that of two women; however, in the civil, criminal, and administrative courts, the testimony of women and men is considered equal. Unmarried women 21 years of age or older are free to obtain a passport and travel abroad without permission of a male relative; however, a married woman must obtain her husband's permission to apply for or renew a passport. Once she has a passport, a married woman does not need her husband's permission to travel, but he may prevent her departure from the country by placing a 24-hour travel ban on her through immigration authorities. After this 24-hour period, a court order is required if the husband still wishes to prevent his wife from leaving the country. In practice, however, many travel bans are issued without court order, effectively preventing citizens and foreigners from departing. All minor children (under age 21) require their father's permission to travel outside the country. This also applies to children born to citizen fathers and noncitizen mothers; such children are regarded as citizens and must be raised as Muslims.

Inheritance is governed by Islamic law, which differs according to the branch of Islam. In the absence of a direct male heir, Shi'a women may inherit all property, while Sunni women inherit only a portion with the balance divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased.

During the reporting period, there were no reports of the Government prohibiting state employees from displaying or practicing any elements of their faith. However, in late 2003, the headmistress of a public high school in Farwaniya district reportedly dismissed several female students for failure to wear the Islamic hijab

(headscarf). The school readmitted the students and the headmistress was criticized widely in the local media.

The law requires jail terms for journalists who defame religion. Academic freedom is limited in practice by self-censorship, and academics, like journalists, are legally prohibited from criticizing Islam. The law also provides that any Muslim citizen may file criminal charges against an author if the citizen believes that the author has defamed Islam, the ruling family, or public morals.

On March 20, an appeals court sentenced a journalist to a 1 year suspended sentence for a 2004 article deemed to defame the Qur'an. The publication's editor received a \$170 (50KD) fine in 2004. Three Islamist activists filed the complaint resulting in the court case.

In January 2004, the Court of Misdemeanor sentenced a Shi'a citizen to 1 year in jail with hard labor and fined him approximately \$3,500 (1,000 KD) for producing and distributing an audiotape defaming the Islamic (Sunni) religion, degrading its rituals and rites, and defaming and abusing the Prophet Muhammed's Companions. In February 2004, the citizen reportedly was released from prison in error by an Amiri pardon issued on the occasion of the country's National Day. The Government subsequently issued a warrant for his arrest, but he reportedly remained at large. In March 2004, the Appeals Court dismissed the original misdemeanor verdict and referred the citizen's case to the Public Prosecutor for re-trial by the Criminal Court. As a result, the citizen also faced more serious charges of violating the State Security Law. In May 2004, the Criminal Court sentenced him to 10 years in jail in absentia for defaming (Sunni) Islam. Most Shi'a believe that hardline Sunni Islamist pressure was behind the Government's harsh action against the individual, even though they too publicly condemned his anti-Sunni statements and the audiocassette incident.

In April 2004, Sunni Islamist members of the National Assembly's Education, Culture, and Guidance Committee proposed separating an article in the Press and Publications Law governing the penalties for blasphemy and other crimes that defame religion into two distinct articles: one outlining the penalties for blasphemy and disparagement of messengers, prophets, angels, and the Holy Qur'an; and the other specifying affronting the Prophet Muhammed's Companions and wives as a separate offense (i.e., specifically criminalizing Shi'a disparagement of Sunni religious belief). By June, the committee had not issued a final decision on the issue.

The Ministry of Interior, General Customs Department, arrested and deported 32 individuals in 2004 for allegedly practicing sorcery and confiscated alleged sorcery-related materials during the reporting period.

The Government does not designate religion on passports or national identity documents.

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. There have been cases in which U.S. citizen children have been abducted from the United States and not allowed to return under the law; however, there were no reports that such children were forced to convert to Islam, or that forced conversion was the reason that they were not allowed to return to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Education continued to review a Shi'a proposal to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics; however, at the end of the reporting year, no action had been taken. The Ministry also continued to review a request from the Roman Catholic Church to allow Catholic students at certain private schools to study the Catechism during the time allotted for Islamic instruction.

There was increased interfaith dialogue among Christian denominations with the establishment of a council representing Christian leaders from various churches. Government officials promoted interfaith understanding by meeting with Shi'a and Sunni leaders. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs also sponsored a conference in an attempt to increase religious tolerance.

On May 28, more than 10,000 worshippers from the Bohra community celebrated the Sultan of Bohra's birthday without interference. The Bohra participants, who are Shi'a Muslims mainly from Gujarat in western India, gathered at their community center.

The death of Pope John Paul II received wide press coverage throughout April 2005, including full-page spreads in local newspapers. In a country whose Catholic population comprises approximately 5 percent of all residents, the Government issued a public statement expressing “agony of the Christian brothers” following the Pope’s death. Senior Kuwaiti officials attended commemoration events at the Catholic cathedral, and an Amiri envoy led a delegation representing the Government at the Pope’s funeral in the Vatican.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

In general there are amicable relations among the various religious communities, and citizens generally are open and tolerant of other religions; however, there is a small minority of ultraconservatives opposed to the presence of non-Muslim groups.

While some discrimination based on religion reportedly occurs on a personal level, most observers agree that it is not widespread. There is a perception among some domestic employees and other members of the unskilled labor force, particularly Southeast Asian nationals, that they would receive better treatment from employers as well as from society as a whole if they converted to Islam; however, others do not see conversion to Islam as a factor in this regard.

The conversion of Muslims to other religions is forbidden. While such conversions reportedly have occurred, they have been done quietly and discreetly. Known converts face harassment, including: loss of job, repeated summonses to police stations, arbitrary detention, physical and verbal abuse, police monitoring of their activities, and property damage without legal recourse.

The liberation of Iraq’s Shi’a majority has increased the assertiveness of Shi’a in the country, who achieved some important gains against institutionalized discrimination during the reporting period. Some hardline Sunni Islamist extremists became more outwardly hostile toward Shi’a religious practices and distributed virulently anti-Shi’a leaflets outside Sunni mosques during the reporting period. To prevent an escalation in sectarian tensions and demonstrate the Government’s commitment to religious freedom, the Prime Minister met separately with the various religious and political groups during the year to promote religious tolerance and combat extremism.

During the reporting period, some well-known Salafis called on Muslims to refrain from congratulating non-Muslims on their holidays. In December 2004, the Chairman of the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society’s (RIHS) Good Word Committee announced in an Arabic daily newspaper that it is forbidden for Muslims to imitate non-Muslims in all matters, including participating in non-Muslim festivals and holidays. The announcement stated that Muslims are “prohibited from sharing the Christian and other infidel faiths’ holidays in any form, whether by attendance, exchange of gifts, or expression of joy.”

During the reporting period, an extremist Salafi cleric preached violent jihad in Kuwait. The Government also blocked access to the Salafi preacher’s website in February and banned him from preaching at his mosque in March. He then was detained by KSS forces for alleged links to two of the January shoot-outs between law enforcement officials and militants.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Intensive monitoring of religious freedom issues has long been an Embassy priority. U.S. Embassy officials meet frequently with recognized Sunni, Shi’a, and Christian groups, as well as representatives of various unrecognized faiths and of NGOs that deal with religious freedom issues. Such meetings have afforded Embassy officials the opportunity to learn about the status and concerns of religious groups and to monitor progress on religious freedom.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officers actively encourage the Government to address the concerns of religious leaders, such as overcrowding, lack of adequate worship space and access to religious materials, insufficient staffing, and bureaucratic delays in processing routine requests. During the reporting period, Embassy officials met with senior representatives from the major recognized Christian denominations in the country, encouraged them to present their concerns in a unified manner to the Government, and advocated on their behalf in high-level meetings with government officials.

Embassy facilities are used for weekly services by Protestant and Roman Catholic congregations largely composed of official personnel and Western expatriates. Offi-

cial premises are used for these services due to overcrowding and security concerns at compounds located in the downtown area.

LEBANON

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. The country's confessionally-based political system merges various political and religious interests, with occasional consequences that can be interpreted as either political or religious discrimination.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. There is no state religion; however, discrimination based on religion is built into the system of government. The Government appoints and pays the salaries of Muslim and Druze judges, as the judicial system is historically part of the state apparatus. Groups that do not enjoy official recognition, such as Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, and unregistered Protestant Christian groups, can be disadvantaged under the law.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were periodic reports of friction between religious groups, which may be attributed to political or religious differences, and citizens still struggled with the legacy of a 15-year civil war fought largely along religious lines. The 2005 parliamentary elections brought out political tensions that arose in many cases along sectarian lines.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 4,035 square miles, and its population is approximately 4 million. Because the matter of parity among confessional groups remains a sensitive political issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932, before the founding of the modern state. However, the country's leading daily newspaper, *an-Nahar*, published on February 10, 2005, a demographic statistical study which put the relative percentages of approximately 3 million members of the voting public as 26.5 percent Sunni Muslim, 26.2 percent Shi'a Muslim, 40.8 percent Christian (Maronites representing 21.1 percent) and 5.6 percent Druze. There has been a steady decline in the number of Christians as compared to Muslims. There are also very small numbers of Jews, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Hindus.

There are 18 officially recognized religious groups, of which the primary ones are Muslim, Christian, and Druze. The main branches of Islam are Shi'a and Sunni. The smallest Muslim minorities are the Alawites and the Ismaili ("Sevener") Shi'a order. The Maronites are the largest of the Christian groups. They have had a long and continuous association with the Roman Catholic Church but have their own patriarch, liturgy, and customs. The second largest Christian group is the Greek Orthodox Church (composed of ethnic Arabs who maintain a Greek-language liturgy). Other Christians are divided among Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorians), Armenian Catholics, Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites), Syrian Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldeans, Copts, evangelicals (including Protestant groups such as the Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Friends), and Latins (Roman Catholic). The Druze, who refer to themselves as *al-Muwahhideen*, or "Unitarians," are concentrated in rural, mountainous areas east and south of Beirut. Divisions and rivalries between groups date back many centuries, and while relationships between religious adherents of different confessions are generally amicable, group identity is highly significant for all aspects of life.

There are a number of foreign missionaries operating in the country, primarily from Catholic and evangelical Christian churches.

Many persons fleeing alleged religious mistreatment and discrimination in neighboring states reside in the country, including Kurds, Shi'a, and Chaldeans from Iraq, and Coptic Christians from Egypt and Sudan.

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 some restrictions. The Constitution provides for the free exercise of all religious rites with the caveat that public

order not be disturbed. The Constitution also provides that the personal status and religious interests of citizens be respected. The Government permits recognized religions to exercise authority over matters pertaining to personal status such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. The "Twelver" Shi'a, Sunni, Christian, and Druze each have state-appointed clerical bodies to administer family and personal status law through their own religious courts, which the Government subsidizes. There is no state religion; however, politics are based on the principle of religious representation, which has been applied to nearly all aspects of public life. The unwritten "National Pact" of 1943 stipulates that the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of Parliament be a Maronite Christian, a Sunni Muslim, and a Shi'a Muslim, respectively. The 1989 Taif Accord, which ended the country's 15-year civil war, reaffirmed this arrangement but resulted in increased Muslim representation in Parliament and reduced the power of the Maronite President.

The following religious holy days are considered national holidays: New Year, Armenian Christmas, Eid al-Adha, St. Maroun Day, the Muslim New Year, Ashura, Good Friday, Easter (for both Western and Eastern rites), the Birth of the Prophet, All Saints' Day, Feast of the Assumption, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas. Also, the Government excuses from work public sector employees of the Armenian churches on St. Vartan Day.

State recognition is a legal requirement for religious groups to conduct certain religious practices. A group that seeks official recognition must submit its dogma and moral principles for government review to ensure that such principles do not contradict popular values and the Constitution. The group must ensure that the number of its adherents is sufficient to maintain its continuity.

Alternatively, religious groups may apply to obtain recognition through existing religious groups. Official recognition conveys certain benefits, such as tax-exempt status and the right to apply the religion's codes to personal status matters. An individual may change religions if the head of the religious group the person wishes to join approves of this change.

Citizens belonging to a faith not recognized by the Government are permitted to perform their religious rites freely; however, their political rights are not secured. For example, a Baha'i cannot run for Parliament because there is not a seat allocated for this confession, neither can he/she secure a senior position in the Government as these are also allocated on a confessional basis. However, a number of religious faiths are recorded under the existing recognized religions. For example, most Baha'i are registered under the Shi'a sect, and thus Baha'i can run for office to fill a seat allocated to the Shi'a sect. Similarly, Mormons are registered under the Greek Orthodox faith. Decisions on granting official recognition of religious groups do not appear to be arbitrary; in recent years, the Government has recognized such groups as the Alawites and the Copts.

The Government allows private religious education. In 2002, Muslim and Christian clergy finalized a set of unified religious education material to be used in public schools; however, the materials have not yet been included in school curricula.

The Government permits publishing religious materials in different languages.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by supporting a committee on Islamic-Christian dialogue, which is co-chaired by a Muslim and a Christian, and includes representatives of the major religious groups. Leading religious figures who promote Islamic-Christian dialogue and ecumenism are encouraged to visit and are received by government officials at the highest levels. Clerics play a leading role in many ecumenical movements worldwide. For example, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch, Aram I, is the moderator for the World Council of Churches. The Imam Musa Sadr Foundation also has played a role in fostering the ecumenical message of Musa Sadr, a Shi'a cleric who disappeared in Libya in 1978. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization funded a \$10,000 project for the publication of a book on Christian-Islamic understanding in the country. The book was authored by 16 Muslim and Christian scholars and has been available on the local market since 2002.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The 1989 Taif Accord called for the ultimate abolition of political sectarianism in favor of "expertise and competence;" however, little substantive progress has been made in this regard. Christians and Muslims are represented equally in Parliament, the Cabinet, and first category civil service positions, which include the ranks of Secretary General and Director General. One notable exception is the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which, through universal conscription and an emphasis on professionalism, has significantly reduced the role of confessionalism in that organization. Seats in Parliament and the Cabinet, and posts in the civil service, are distributed proportionally among the 18 recognized religious groups.

Officially unrecognized groups such as Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, and some evangelical denominations may own property and assemble for worship without government interference; however, they are disadvantaged under the law because legally they may not marry, divorce, or inherit in the country. Protestant evangelical churches are required to register with the Evangelical Synod, which represents those churches to the Government. The Synod is a nongovernmental advisory body representing Protestant churches in the country. It is self-governing and oversees religious issues for the congregations. Representatives of some churches have complained that the Synod has refused to accept new members since 1975, thereby crippling their clergy's ability to minister to communities in accordance with their beliefs.

In February 2004, the Government denied a residency permit to the nonresident leader of a local Pentecostal community, who was in Lebanon on a visitor's visa, and granted him seven days to depart the country. The Government informed him he must register as a religious worker in order to re-apply for a residency permit. He left the country as ordered, but has been unable to return. He claimed he could not fulfill this requirement of registering as a religious worker because the head of the Evangelical Synod refused to register his congregation.

In October 2004, the Minister of Labor ordered shops in the coastal city of Sidon to close on Fridays at the request of the predominantly Muslim Merchants' Association of Sidon.

Many families have relatives who belong to different religious communities, and intermarriage is not uncommon; however, intermarriage may be difficult to arrange in practice between members of some groups because there are no procedures for civil marriage. However, the Government recognizes civil ceremonies performed outside the country.

There are no legal barriers to proselytizing; however, traditional attitudes and edicts of the clerical establishment strongly discourage such activity. The clerical establishments are appointed by the religious authorities to which they are affiliated. The nomination of the Sunni and Shi'a Muftis is officially endorsed by the Council of Ministers, and they receive monthly salaries from the Government.

The Government does not require citizens' religious affiliations to be indicated on their passports; however, the Government requires that religious affiliation be encoded on national identity cards.

Religious groups administer their own family and personal status laws. Many of these laws discriminate against women. For example, Sunni inheritance law provides a son twice the inheritance of a daughter. Although Muslim men may divorce easily, Muslim women may do so only with the concurrence of their husbands.

In 2003, the Cabinet endorsed a draft law allowing the country to adopt a curriculum proposed by the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization making Islamic culture the core of the educational curriculum at all levels in schools and universities. Following strong condemnation and opposition from a spectrum of Christian figures, including the head of the Maronite Church, the Shi'ite Speaker of Parliament argued that the bill in its spirit violated the Constitution. The Government subsequently withdrew the bill.

Article 473 of the Penal Code stipulates that one who "blasphemes God publicly" may face imprisonment for up to 1 year. There were no prosecutions reported under this law during the reporting period.

Students and teachers functioning on tourist visas are deemed to have violated their visa status and are consequently deported. The same sanction applies to religious workers not working under the auspices of a Lebanon-registered organization.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees during the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

In October, the outgoing Minister of Education yielded to years of pressure from Muslim leaders and ordered the closure of public schools on Fridays, the Muslim day of prayer. The decree stipulated that if students, teachers, and the neighborhood religious authority agreed, a local public school could continue to operate on Fridays and close over the Saturday-Sunday weekend, which Christians generally

prefer. The result of the decree was respect for Muslim sensibilities in those neighborhoods where Muslims are the majority.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were periodic reports of friction between religious groups, which may be attributed to political or religious differences, and citizens still struggle with the legacy of a 15-year civil war fought largely along religious lines. Religious and political leaderships generally have maintained amicable relations in spite of their political differences. During the reporting period, there was intense sectarian rhetoric and the detonations of five bombs in commercial areas of predominantly Christian neighborhoods in the run-up to parliamentary elections. Leaders of all religious denominations condemned the bombings. Most of the issues at stake concern political or development issues and each party or confession seeks to mobilize as much popular support as possible to obtain its goals.

In the months of March through May, in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, sectarian rhetoric steadily increased, culminating in a statement by the Maronite Bishops' Council which implied that Muslim voters should not have a deciding voice in the election of Christian candidates. The statement by the Bishops' Council, as well as other politically motivated rhetoric, exacerbated sectarian tensions.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no incidents of violence against religious persons.

In 2003, a bomb exploded outside the home of a Western Christian missionary in Tripoli killing one person.

The Government has kept open its investigation into the 2002 bombing of a mosque and shrine in the town of Anjar. The shrine is estimated to date back 800 years and was a popular pilgrimage site for Sunni Muslims. Local Muslim clerics severely criticized the attack, which occurred as Muslims prepared for the Eid al-Fitr feast marking the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Similarly, a permanent search warrant remained in effect in the 2002 murder of an American citizen missionary affiliated with the Christian and Missionary Evangelical Alliance in Sidon, although the case was officially closed in April 2004. Investigations at the time of the murder suggested that Sunni extremists, possibly operating from the nearby Ain al-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp, were responsible.

In 2002, Ahmad Mansur, a Muslim employee at the teachers fund office, shot and killed eight of his colleagues, of whom seven were Christian. Mansur claimed that he committed the crime for confessional reasons. Mansur was arrested and in April 2003 the judicial tribunal (Supreme Court) sentenced him to death. The sentence was carried out on January 17, 2004.

In 1999, Sunni extremists killed four LAF soldiers in an ambush in the northern region of Dinniyah after the soldiers attempted to arrest two Sunni Muslims allegedly involved in a series of church bombings. The LAF retaliated by launching a massive military operation against Sunni extremists in the north. In 2002, some of the suspects who had been arrested went on a hunger strike for a few days to protest trial delays and seek improvements in their detention conditions. The suspects were detained without trial or conviction until July 2005 when they were amnestied by parliament along with a long-jailed Christian leader.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and Israel's occupation of South Lebanon nurtured a strong intolerance for Israelis, and the country's media sometimes referred to the State of Israel as "the Jewish State" to avoid referring explicitly to Israel. During the reporting period, Hizballah, through its media outlets, regularly directed strong rhetoric against Israel and its Jewish population and characterized events in the region as part of a "Zionist conspiracy."

In 2003, Hizballah's Al-Manar television aired a Syrian-made anti-Semitic mini-drama it advertised as portraying the history of the Zionist movement. The station aired the series "Al-Shatat" ("The Diaspora") in daily segments during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan when television audiences peak.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy advances that goal through contacts at all levels of society, public remarks, embassy public affairs programs, and funding of projects. Embassy officers meet periodically with leaders of religious communities and discuss with them issues related to religious freedom and tolerance. The Embassy complained to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Information about the airing of anti-Semitic programs by Al-Manar tele-

vision. The Ambassador raised with the head of the Surete Generale, the agency responsible for all immigration issues, the visa status of several Christian missionaries who had been advised to depart the country and regularize their visa status. The Surete Generale claimed this action was based solely on better enforcement of visa regulations, which it has been doing since the events of September 11, 2001. However, some Christian leaders believe that the denials were a reaction to the lack of supervision by local sponsors of the American missionary killed in Sidon in 2002. The United States supports the principles of the Taif Accord and embassy staff regularly discusses the issue of sectarianism with political, religious, and civic leaders.

During Ramadan, senior Embassy officers hosted for the first time in several years Iftar events on the Embassy compound. In 2004, the Embassy sent a member of the Islamic-Christian Dialogue Committee on a Department of State International Visitor Program to participate in an interfaith program in the United States. Embassy staff regularly attended events sponsored by the Committee on Islamic-Christian Dialogue. U.S.-funded programs in rural areas also require civic participation, often involving villages of different religious backgrounds, with the aim of promoting cooperation between religions.

LIBYA

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right with some restrictions. The State religion is Islam. Although the country is a dictatorship, the Government is tolerant of other faiths, with the exception of militant Islam, which it views as a threat to the regime.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Persons rarely are harassed because of their religious practices unless such practices are perceived as having a political dimension or motivation. Followers of religions other than Islam generally are free to practice according to their beliefs. There is no written law prohibiting religious conversion from Islam to another religion and there is no legal punishment for doing so.

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

In February 2004, the U.S. Government established an official presence in the country and immediately began discussing religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 703,816 square miles, and its population is an estimated 5,765,563, of which approximately 97 percent is Sunni Muslim. There is no reported Shi'a community. There are small Christian communities, composed almost exclusively of foreigners, predominantly African immigrants. A small Anglican community composed of one resident priest and mostly African and Indian immigrant workers in Tripoli is part of the Egyptian Diocese. The Anglican Bishop of Libya is resident in Cairo. There are Unitarian churches in Tripoli and Benghazi as well as small Unitarian congregations scattered throughout the country. There are an estimated 50,000 Roman Catholics who are served by two bishops—one in Tripoli and one in Benghazi; both communities are multi-national. Catholic priests and nuns serve in all the main coastal cities, and there is one priest in the southern city of Sebha. Most of them work in hospitals, orphanages, and with the handicapped and the elderly. They enjoy good relations with the Government. The Catholic bishops, priests, and nuns wear religious dress freely in public and report virtually no discrimination. In 1997, the Vatican established diplomatic relations with the country, stating that the country had taken steps to protect freedom of religion. The Vatican's goal was to address more adequately the needs of the estimated 100,000 Christians in the country. There is an accredited Nuncio resident in Malta and a bishop resident in Tripoli. There are also Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox priests in both Tripoli and Benghazi.

There still may be a very small number of Jews, but their location is unknown. The World Jewish Congress reported that there were no more than 20 Jews in 1974. The Jewish community, which numbered around 35,000 in 1948, left for Israel at various stages between 1948 and 1967. The Government has been rehabilitating the "medina" (old city) in Tripoli and renovated the large synagogue there; however, the synagogue has not reopened.

In his August 31, 2004 Revolution Day speech, Colonel Libyan Leader Mu'ammarr Al Qadhafi called for compensation for Jews who had been expelled. In October, a

group of Italian Jews of Libyan origin traveled to the country at the invitation of the Government to begin preliminary discussions regarding possible compensation for confiscated communal properties.

There was no information available about other non-Muslim groups, such as Hindus, Baha'is, and Buddhists.

There was no information on the number of foreign missionaries in the country. Proselytizing by non-Muslims is prohibited.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government restricts freedom of religion. The state religion is Islam; however, the Government aggressively opposes militant forms of Islam, which it views as a threat to the regime. The Government regulates the number of places of worship allowed for each Christian denomination present in each city. The Government continues to ban the once powerful Sanusiyya Islamic order; in its place, the country's leader, Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi, established the World Islamic Call Society (WICS), which is the Islamic arm of the Government's foreign policy and is active worldwide. The WICS also is responsible for relations with other religious communities, including Christians. These churches report good cooperation with the WICS. The WICS's main purpose is to promote a moderate form of Islam that reflects the Government's religious views and to ban Islamic groups whose beliefs and practices are at variance with the state-approved teaching of Islam. Although most Islamic institutions are under government control, prominent families endow some mosques. However, these mosques generally adhere to the government-approved interpretation of Islam.

The Government recognizes the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and the Birth of the Prophet.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government controls most mosques and Islamic institutions, and even mosques endowed by prominent families generally must conform to the government-approved interpretation of Islam. According to recent reports, individuals rarely are harassed because of their religious practices, unless such practices are perceived as having a political dimension or motivation.

Members of minority religions are allowed to conduct services. Christian churches operate openly. The Government routinely grants visas and residence papers to religious staff from other nations. The Government restored the former Catholic Church in the medina, which, during the reporting period, was used as an art exhibition hall. The Government has not honored a promise made in 1970 to provide the Anglican Church with appropriate alternative facilities when it took the property used by the Church. The Anglicans shared a villa with other Protestant denominations until 1998 when the Government gave them a small suite of offices to use for worship. Similarly, the Government has not returned Unitarian Church property confiscated in 1971 despite requests from the Church.

The Government allowed priests to visit six Bulgarian medics imprisoned since 1999 for allegedly infecting children with HIV. The medics, convicted and sentenced to death in May 2004, were allowed to worship with the Greek Orthodox priest in Tripoli for Easter on May 1, 2005.

There are no known places of worship for other non-Muslim religions such as Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Buddhism, although adherents are allowed to practice within the privacy of their homes. Foreign adherents of these religions are allowed to display and sell religious items at bazaars and other gatherings.

Religious instruction in Islam is required in public schools, but in-depth instruction in other religions is not taught. The Government does not issue information on the religious affiliation of children in public schools, and there were no reports of children transferring to private schools for alternative religious instruction.

There were no reports of Government punishment for apostasy.

The Government monitors and restricts all political activity. It also restricts religious literature, including Islamic literature, published in or allowed into the country.

The country adheres to traditional Islamic law that states: a non-Muslim woman who marries a Muslim man is not required to convert to Islam, although many do so; however, a non-Muslim man must convert to marry a Muslim woman.

Citizens who wish to make the Hajj must be at least 40 years old.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2002, the now defunct extrajudicial People's Court in Tripoli sentenced to death Salem Abu Hanak and Abdullah Ahmed Izzedin, 2 out of at least 152 professionals and students who were arbitrarily arrested in 1998 in Benghazi for alleged involvement with Islamic organizations. According to Amnesty International, the men never advocated violence against the Government. An additional 83 received sentences of 10 years to life imprisonment and 66 were acquitted. In December 2004, the Appellate Court confirmed the prison terms and the two death sentences. At the end of the reporting period, the two men sentenced to death were awaiting a decision on their Supreme Court appeal.

All of the above defendants were held incommunicado and their whereabouts remained unknown for more than two years following their detention. Additionally, lawyers for the accused were not allowed to study their case files or meet with their clients. The lawyers were denied access to the court, and the judge appointed government clerks to replace them.

Some practicing Muslims have shaved their beards to avoid harassment from members of the security services, who tend to associate wearing beards with advocacy of militant Islam aimed at overthrowing the current regime. In the late 1980s, the Government began to pursue a domestic policy directed against Islamic extremists; the events of September 11, 2001 reinforced Qadhafi's view that Islamic militancy is a potential rallying point for opponents of the regime. The security service does not harass those who frequently attend mosque services.

There continued to be reports of armed clashes between security forces and Islamic groups that oppose the regime and advocate the establishment of an Islamic government that would enforce a more conservative form of Islam. There are no reports available on the number or status of individuals detained because of their religious beliefs.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting year.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Information on the relationship among religions in society is limited, although some members of non-Muslim minority religions reported that they do not face harassment by authorities or the Muslim majority on the basis of religion.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

In February 2004, the United States established an official presence in Libya and immediately began discussing religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Additionally, the Embassy established an outreach program to maintain close communication with the leaders of the various religious denominations in the country.

MOROCCO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Constitution states that Islam is the official state religion; however, non-Muslim communities openly practice their faith.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government places certain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing, and several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities are deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, converts to Christianity generally face social ostracism.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 172,320 square miles. According to the 2004 census, the population was 29,891,708. The census also states that 99 percent of the citizens are Sunni Muslims.

The Jewish community numbers approximately 5,000 and resides primarily in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas, as well as in some smaller cities throughout the country. The expatriate Christian community, Catholic and Protestant, consists of 5,000 practicing members, although estimates of Christians residing in the country at any particular time range up to 25,000.

Most Christians reside in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas. The Baha'i community, also located in those regions, numbers 350 to 400 persons.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides that Islam is the official religion and designates the King as "Commander of the Faithful" with the responsibility of ensuring "respect for Islam." The Constitution also provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government places certain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing, and several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitors the activities of mosques and places other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities are deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature. Jewish and foreign Christian communities openly practice their faiths. A small foreign Hindu community may freely perform cremations and hold services. In the past, the Government reportedly has forbidden Baha'is from meeting or participating in communal activities; however, there were no reports that their activities were restricted during the period covered by this report.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic New Year, the Birth of the Prophet, and Eid al-Fitr. Other religions observe religious holy days without interference from government authorities.

During the reporting period, the Government did not license or approve new religions or religious organizations. In March 2004, an English-speaking church group received nonprofit association status as the "Protestant Church." Other registered churches and associations include the Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, French Protestant, and Anglican churches.

The Rabat Protestant Church and other minority religious groups have been operating unfettered by government authorities since the 1970s and registration allows the groups to make financial transactions and other plans as private associations and legal entities. In 2002, Al Ghadir became the first Shi'a organization to ask for official status, but at the end of the reporting period, official status had not been granted.

The Government provides tax benefits, land and building grants, subsidies, and customs exemptions for imports necessary for the religious activities of the major religious groups.

The teaching of Islam in public schools is funded in the Government's annual education budget.

The annual budget also funds religious instruction in Jewish public schools. The Government has funded several efforts to study the cultural, artistic, literary, and scientific heritage of Jewish citizens. In the Faculty of Letters at the University of Rabat, two professors teach Hebrew and one teaches comparative religion in the Department of Islamic Studies. Throughout the country, approximately 12 more professors teach Hebrew.

The Government continues to encourage tolerance, respect, and dialogue among religions. During the reporting period, senior government officials, including the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, have received delegations of American Christian and Jewish leaders and Turkish Jewish leaders.

King Mohammed VI established the Islamic-Judeo Observatory, a body of international scholars to promote religious tolerance and monitor intolerance. In April, the country hosted the Muslim-Judeo dialogue in Marrakech. It is the only Arab nation with a Jewish museum. The country hosted a concert of contemporary Christian music to perform alongside local bands during a 3-day concert in May. This event was preceded by a foreign business development conference in Fez organized by a foreign Christian evangelical.

The Government organizes the annual "Fez Festival of Sacred Music," which includes musicians from Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Native American spiritual traditions. This year marked the eleventh anniversary of the festival. During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the King hosts colloquia of Islamic religious scholars that, among other issues, consider ways to encourage tolerance and mutual respect within Islam and between Islam and other religions. For the second consecutive year, a woman spoke during Ramadan in the presence of the King and religious scholars. A woman is also a member of the Supreme Council of Ulemas, or religious scholars.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs monitors Friday mosque sermons and the Qur'anic schools to ensure the teaching of approved doctrine. At times the authorities suppress the activities of Islamists but generally tolerate activities limited to the propagation of Islam, education, and charity. Security forces commonly close mosques to the public shortly after Friday services to prevent use of the premises for unauthorized political activity. The Government strictly controls authorization to construct new mosques. Most mosques are constructed using private funds.

In April 2004, King Mohammed VI, in his capacity as chief religious authority, announced plans to restructure the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to ensure the promotion of moderate Islam and guard against imported Islamic doctrines and extremists preaching in mosques.

In 2004, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments took charge of and monitored the activities of mosques, placed other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities were deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice or become political in nature, and began to provide religious training for imams. Authorities said that all of these measures were put in place in order to avoid exploitation of mosques for political propaganda, such as distributing pamphlets and raising funds.

In June 2003, several preachers and religious counselors were accused of exploiting mosques for political purposes, such as promoting Islamist parties. The Government continued to monitor sermons and mosque practices during the reporting period.

The Government does not recognize the Islamic Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), which rejects the King's spiritual authority, as a political movement. However, the JCO continued to hold meetings, organize and participate in demonstrations, and operate two websites, although the Government did not allow the JCO to publish written materials.

Restrictions on academic freedom prevented open debate on Islam. Government informers monitored campus activities, mostly Islamist.

Any attempt to induce a Muslim to convert is illegal.

According to Article 220 of the Penal Code, any attempt to stop one or more persons from the exercise of their religious beliefs or from attendance at religious services is unlawful and may be punished by 3 to 6 months' imprisonment and a fine of \$10 to \$50 (115 to 575 dirhams). The article applies the same penalty to "anyone who employs incitements to shake the faith of a Muslim or to convert him to another religion." Foreign missionaries either limit their proselytizing to non-Muslims or conduct their work quietly. The Government has cited the penal code's prohibition on proselytism in most cases in which courts expelled foreign missionaries. During this reporting period, there were reports of police questioning foreign missionaries because they were carrying Christian materials.

Citizens who convert to Christianity and other religions generally face social ostracism, and a small number of converts have faced short periods of questioning or detention by authorities for proselytizing and have been denied issuance of passports.

According to the foreign non-governmental organization Middle East Concern, on January 6, police arrested a Christian convert from Islam on charges of proselytism, whose passport was found on a foreign Christian arrested for distributing Christian materials in Tetouan. At the end of the reporting period, the individual was free on bail, with his next hearing set for October 2005. Middle East Concern also reported that as of mid-July 2004 authorities had either confiscated or refused to renew the passports of five citizens who had converted from Islam to Christianity. Three of the converts received their passports by August 2004, but foreign Christian leaders in the country alleged that two of them experienced police harassment and long interrogation sessions. The remaining two received their passports by the end of the reporting period. The reports on these individuals could not be confirmed by other sources.

Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the criminal or civil codes; however, until 6 years ago, the authorities had jailed some converts based on references to Islamic law that prohibit conversion. Nevertheless, Muslim citizens are allowed to study at Christian and Jewish schools. A Jewish school in Casablanca includes Muslim students, and a hospital run by the Jewish community provides care to low-income citizens regardless of religion.

A small foreign Christian community operates churches, orphanages, hospitals, and schools without any government restrictions. Missionaries who refrain from proselytizing and conduct themselves in accordance with societal expectations largely are left unhindered; however, those whose activities become public face expulsion. In March, authorities expelled a South African pastor of a Protestant church in Marrakech for not having lucrative employment, although authorities had renewed his temporary residence permit annually for 5 years until January. The deportation followed a series of news and opinion articles in the local press concerning the presence of foreign Christian missionaries in the country; the Government's invitation to American Christian leaders to visit and meet with political and religious officials; a discussion on comparative religion that took place in March in a Marrakech classroom; and the job performance of the Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments.

In May 2004, authorities detained for several hours and expelled seven foreign missionaries for distributing Christian materials in Marrakech's main square.

In the past, some other missionaries have been questioned by authorities or have not been granted a "temporary residence permit" enabling them to remain in the country on a long-term basis.

The Government permits the display and sale of Bibles in French, English, and Spanish, but it confiscates Arabic-language Bibles and refuses licenses for their importation and sale despite the absence of any law banning such books. Nevertheless, Arabic Bibles have been sold in local bookstores.

Since 1983, the Government has forbidden the small Baha'i community from meeting or participating in communal activities; however, there were no reports during this reporting period that the Ministry of the Interior summoned Baha'is for questioning or denied them passports, as had occurred in past years. Small groups of Baha'is meet in private homes for communal worship without interference from the state.

There are two sets of laws and courts—one for Jews and one for Muslims—pertaining to marriage, inheritance, and family matters. The family law courts are administered, depending on the law that applies, by rabbinical and Islamic authorities who are court officials. Parliament authorizes any changes to those laws. Under the new Family Law Code for Muslims, new civil judges were recruited. By February 2004, 160 judges had completed training in the reforms of the personal status code, and the Government reported that 20 family courts were operational. Plans called for the establishment of 70 family courts with 1 for each province.

Rabbinical authorities will continue to administer family courts for Jews. Non-Qur'anic sections of Muslim law on personal status are applicable to non-Muslim and non-Jewish persons. Christians inherit according to the civil law, which reflects the changes to the family code. Jews maintain their own separate inheritance law based on Jewish tradition.

Women traditionally have experienced various forms of legal and cultural discrimination in criminal and civil law, which is based on the official interpretation of Shari'a. In 2003, the Parliament passed reforms of the Personal Status Code that gave women the same rights as men in divorce cases and granted mothers custody of minor children, increased the marriage age from 15 to 18, and imposed limitations on polygamy that make it all but impossible to practice it. The reforms also abolished obsolete codified traditions that favored male heirs based on the official interpretation of Shari'a. For example, under the revised code grandchildren on the daughter's side of the family may inherit from their grandparents. The reforms are being implemented and have received positive feedback from women's groups. They are predicated on the establishment of family courts and the creation of a family aid fund, and they rely more heavily on the court system than did the previous law. On February 14, the 1-year anniversary of the new family code, or Moudawana, top government officials held a conference in which they presented evidence of the new code's success, including statistics showing a decrease in the number of divorces, an increase in women's requests for divorces, and a decrease in polygamy requests. However, the women's rights group Ligue Democratique des Droits de la Femme (LDDF) disputed the government statistics on divorce in a February 26 report, branding the reforms a "failure" due partly to conservative courts, to which the code leaves much leeway.

Under the criminal code, women generally are accorded the same treatment as men.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, converts to Christianity generally face social ostracism.

From January until the May concert of contemporary Christian music, there was an ongoing societal debate on the influence of evangelical Christianity in the country. In January, the French language weekly *Le Journal* reported that an Istiqlal (Nationalist Party) party member, Jilali Abouali, challenged the Minister of Islamic Affairs in Parliament about allowing Christian evangelical missionaries into the country. In April, an Islamist Arabic-daily newspaper, *Attajdid*, carried an editorial by Habib Choubani, a member of parliament representing the Islamist Party for Justice and Development (PJD), charging that evangelicals were invading and that the Government, by permitting the concert, was undermining the country's "spiritual security." In spite of considerable criticism, the Government allowed the May concert to take place and no negative incidents occurred.

Foreigners attend religious services without any restrictions or fear of reprisals. Residents of all religions generally say the country is enriched by its centuries-old Jewish minority, and for the most part Jews lived throughout the country in safety. In September 2003, a Jewish merchant was murdered in an apparently religiously motivated killing. During the May 2003 terrorist attacks, members of the Salafiya Jihadia targeted a Jewish community center in Casablanca. After the attacks, Jews marched in solidarity with Muslims to condemn terrorism. There have been thousands of arrests and many prosecutions of persons tied to the May bombing and other extremist activity. Annual Jewish commemorations took place around the country as normal, and Jewish pilgrims from around the region regularly come to holy sites in the country. There were no reports of attacks on Jews during the reporting period.

Although free expression of Islamic faith and free academic and theological discussion of non-Islamic religions are accepted on television and radio, society discourages public efforts to proselytize. Most citizens view such public acts as provocative threats to law and order in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. In addition, society expects public respect for the institutions and mores of Islam, although private behavior and beliefs are unregulated and unmonitored. Because many Muslims view the Baha'i Faith as a heretical offshoot of Islam, most members of the tiny Baha'i community maintain a low religious profile; however, Baha'is live freely and without fear for their persons or property, and some hold government jobs.

There is widespread consensus among Muslims regarding religious practices and interpretation. While some dissenters challenge the religious authority of the King and call for the establishment of a government more deeply rooted in their vision of Islam, the majority of citizens do not appear to share their view.

Unlike in the past, there were no incidents of religious intolerance in the media or in school textbooks during the period covered by this report.

In May, an interfaith service at the Catholic Cathedral in Rabat commemorated the death of Pope John Paul II. Senior government officials, including some ministers and palace advisors, attended the event. The ceremony featured Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious speakers.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials encountered no interference from the Government in making contacts with members of any religious group.

Embassy officials met regularly with religious officials, including the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Islamic religious scholars, leaders of the Jewish community, Christian missionaries, the leaders of the registered Christian communities, and other local Christians during the period covered by this report.

WESTERN SAHARA

The Moroccan Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, the laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are similar to those found in the Kingdom of Morocco.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The territory has an area of approximately 102,706 square miles, and its population is approximately 273,000. The overwhelming majority of the population is Sunni Muslim.

There is a tiny foreign community working for the U.N. Peacekeeping Mission in the territory (known by its French acronym, MINURSO).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Moroccan Constitution provides for freedom of religion. Due to continuing Moroccan administrative control of the territory, laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom are similar to those found in the kingdom of Morocco.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Restrictions on religious freedom in the territory are similar to those found in Morocco.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

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, through the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

OMAN

The Basic Law provides for the freedom to practice religious rites, in accordance with tradition, if the practices do not breach public order, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there are some de facto limitations on proselytizing and printing religious material. The Basic Law declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, over the course of several months beginning in December 2004, several dozen Ibadhi Muslims were arrested and charged with belonging to an illegal organization and seeking to overthrow the Government to establish an Ibadhi religious state. Although most were formally convicted in May of possessing

illegal weapons and sentenced to terms of 1 to 20 years, the Sultan issued each of them a complete pardon on June 9. Non-Muslim religious worship is permitted, and Sultan Qaboos Al Sa'id, the monarch of the country, has given land for the construction of Hindu and Christian centers of worship.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 119,498 square miles, and its population is 2.33 million, of whom 1.8 million are citizens, according to the 2003 national census. While no official statistics are kept on religious affiliation, most citizens are Ibadhi or Sunni Muslims. The Government does not give official preference to any particular religious group. Statistical data on the religious affiliation of the population is not collected nor publicized. There also is a small but significant population of Shi'a Muslims concentrated in the capital area and along the country's Batinah coast. Ibadhism, a form of Islam distinct from Shi'ism and the "Orthodox" schools of Sunnism, became the dominant religious sect in the country by the eighth century A.D. Known for its moderate conservatism, Oman is the only country in the Islamic world to have had a majority Ibadhi population. One distinguishing feature of Ibadhism is the choice of ruler, known as the Imam, by communal consensus. Additionally, there is a small community of ethnically Indian Hindu citizens and reportedly a very small number of Christian citizens who came from India or the Levant and who have been naturalized.

The majority of non-Muslims are noncitizen immigrant workers from South Asia. There are a number of Christian denominations represented.

While there is no information regarding missionary groups in the country, several faith-based organizations operate. Clergy of the Anglican Church, the Reformed Church of America, and other Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox groups are present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law provides for the freedom to practice religious rites, in accordance with tradition, if the practices do not breach public order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. The Basic Law declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. Within these parameters, the Government permits freedom of worship for non-Muslims. The Basic Law prohibits discrimination against individuals on the basis of religion or religious group. Some non-Muslims worship at churches and temples built on land donated by the Sultan, including two Catholic, two Protestant, and two Hindu complexes. Adherents of other religious faiths, typically found among expatriate residents, practice their rites in less formal facilities, such as at company labor compounds.

All religious organizations must be registered with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and the Government restricts some of their activities. The criterion for registration is opaque. Religious groups seeking registration must submit an application to the Ministry. The Ministry investigates the number of affiliates and area of concentration and once approved, the Ministry issues a written letter to the group allowing them to engage in religious activity or to establish a place of worship.

In late 2004 and 2005, the Government arrested dozens of Ibadhi Muslim citizens and brought several charges against them, including belonging to an illegal religious organization. One non-Muslim religious organization present in the country for several decades has had its application for formal registration pending at the Ministry for several years. Anecdotal evidence suggests that visiting non-Muslim organizations are permitted to operate within legal boundaries if a registered entity agrees to sponsor them with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The Government has sponsored forums at which differing interpretations of Islam have been examined, and government-sponsored interfaith dialogue took place on a regular basis. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs hosted several Christian and Muslim scholars and lecturers of various schools of thought to discuss interfaith relations and tolerance in Islamic traditions. In April, the Sultanate sent a delegation to the 17th International Conference for the

Higher Council of Islamic Affairs in Jordan. Also in April, the minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs participated in a forum in Qatar on U.S.-Islamic dialogue.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic (Hijra) New Year, the Birth of the Prophet, Ascension Day, and Eid al-Fitr.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Citizens and noncitizen residents are free to discuss their religious beliefs within the limits of the law; however, the Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. The Basic Law does not specifically prohibit proselytizing, nor does any other law; however, in practice the Government uses immigration regulations and laws concerning morals to restrict individuals suspected of engaging in proselytizing.

Under Islamic law, a Muslim who recants belief in Islam is considered an apostate and dealt with under applicable Islamic legal procedure. During the reporting period, there were no cases of persons punished for conversion, and the Government asserts that it has no legal authority to prosecute persons for changing their religious beliefs. Proselytizing non-Muslims by Muslims is allowed. The Government records religious affiliation on national identity cards for citizens, and on residency cards for noncitizens. Religious affiliation was previously recorded on passports; however, they no longer contain this information. Statistics on religious affiliation are not published.

The Government prohibits non-Muslim groups from publishing religious material, although non-Muslim religious material printed abroad may be imported. Members of all religions and religious groups are free to maintain links with co-religionists abroad and to undertake foreign travel for religious purposes. Clergy from abroad are permitted to visit to carry out duties related to registered religious organizations.

The Government expects all imams to preach sermons within the parameters of standardized texts distributed monthly by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The Government monitors sermons at mosques to ensure that the imams do not discuss political topics and stay within the state-approved orthodoxy of Islam. The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs maintains a web site and toll-free number whereby questions on issues of the practice of faith and worship can be answered by the Grand Mufti or his representatives. The Grand Mufti regularly appears on television and radio to answer questions from the public.

Some aspects of Islamic law and tradition as practiced in the country discriminate against women. Shari'a favors male heirs in adjudicating inheritance claims. While there is continuing reluctance to take an inheritance dispute to court for fear of alienating the family, women increasingly are aware of and taking steps to protect and exercise their rights as citizens. When Oman acceded in April 2005 to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it attached reservations on any provision within the Convention deemed to be not in accordance with Islamic law.

Citizen children must attend schools that provide instruction in Islam; noncitizen children may attend schools that do not offer instruction in Islam. Instruction in Islam is a component of the basic curriculum in all public school grades K-12. The curriculum focuses on the Qur'an and Hadith, the life of the Prophet Muhammed and his companions, and the five pillars of the Islamic faith. The curriculum primarily reflects the Ibadhi school of Islamic thought, although schools reportedly made allowances in certain regions where other interpretations of Islam predominate.

Military bases maintain at least one mosque and one imam for the convenience of military personnel. Moreover, training facilities dedicate about three sessions per week for the study of Islamic issues. Non-Muslim members in the military are not prevented from practicing their religion or compelled to undertake mandatory Islamic studies; however, if they wish to worship they must seek places to do so on their own.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, approximately 50 persons were arrested, detained, and suspended from their employment on suspicion of belonging to an illegal organization, and of conspiring to overthrow the Government to resurrect an Ibadhi religious state. The Government claims the accused had weapons and violent intent, although some of the accused admitted only to belonging to an organization devoted to propagating Ibadhi religious values. However, on June 9, just 30 days after their convictions, Sultan Qaboos issued a pardon of the 31 arrestees who stood trial. The Government announced that the pardoned individuals were also free to resume their previous employment.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious discrimination in the private sector is largely absent. Christian theologians have met with local Islamic authorities and with members of the faculty at the country's major university. Private groups that promote interfaith dialogue are permitted to exist as long as discussions do not constitute an attempt to cause Muslims to recant their Islamic beliefs. Societal attitudes toward proselytizing and conversion generally are negative.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. This included inquiries into the arrests of the alleged Ibadhi conservatives during the reporting period. Representative of the U.S. Embassy freely participated in local religious ceremonies and have contact with members of non-Muslim religious groups. During the reporting period, the Embassy sponsored the visit of a U.S. research specialist in the field of Islamic studies, who addressed audiences (including at the Sultan's Grand Mosque) on prophecy among the Arabs. In June 2005, the Embassy sponsored an interfaith Ramadan event with an American theologian speaking on Ramadan in America. The Embassy helped to organize a program in the United States on interfaith dialogue for the visiting Omani Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

QATAR

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting the public system and public behavior; however, the Government continues to prohibit proselytization by non-Muslims and places some restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the conservative Wahhabi order of the Sunni branch.

The status of respect for religious freedom improved somewhat during the reporting period. On June 9, the Constitution, which explicitly provides for freedom of worship, including the adoption of laws guaranteeing the freedom of association and public assembly, came into effect. On June 29–30, the Third Conference for Religious Dialogue on Islam, Christianity, and Judaism took place. Non-Muslims may not proselytize, and the Government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious books and materials; however, in practice, individuals and religious institutions are not prevented from importing Bibles and other religious items for personal or congregational use. There are no Shi'a employed in senior national security positions.

There are generally amicable relations among persons of differing religious beliefs.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of approximately 4,254 square miles and its population is an estimated 744,000, of whom approximately 200,000 are believed to be citizens. Of the citizen population, Shi'a Muslims account for approximately 10 percent and Sunni Muslims comprise the remaining 90 percent. The majority of the estimated 544,000 noncitizens are individuals from South and South East Asian and Arab countries working on temporary employment contracts along with their accompanying family members. They are of the following faiths: Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is. Most foreign workers and their families live near the major employment centers of Doha, Al Khor, Messaeed, and Dukhan.

The Christian community is a diverse mix of Indians, Filipinos, Europeans, Arabs, and Americans. It includes Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, Anglican, and other Protestant denominations. The Hindu community is almost exclusively Indian, while Buddhists include South and East Asians. Most Baha'is come from Iran. Religion is not indicated on national identity cards and passports, nor is it a criterion for citizenship in Qatar according to the Nationality Law. However, Qatari citizens are either Sunni or Shi'a Muslims with the exception of a Baha'i and Syrian Christian and their respective families who were granted citizenship. Shi'a citizens and foreigners may attend the small number of Shi'a mosques.

No foreign missionary groups operate openly in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting society and public behavior; however, the Government continues to prohibit proselytization by non-Muslims and places some restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the conservative Wahhabi order of the Sunni branch. Shi'a practice most aspects of their faith freely and they may organize traditional Shi'a ceremonies and perform rites such as self-flagellation. Qatari law on nationality does not impose any restrictions on religious identity.

The Government and ruling family are linked inextricably to Islam. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs controls the construction of mosques, clerical affairs, and Islamic education for adults and new converts. The Emir participates in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods and personally finances the Hajj journeys of pilgrims who cannot afford to travel to Mecca.

The Government has given legal status to Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Coptic, and many Asian Christian denominations. It maintains an official approved register of approved religious congregations.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Islamic New Year, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Converting to another religion from Islam is considered apostasy and is technically a capital offense; however, since 1971 there has been no record of an execution or other punishments for such a crime.

The Government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature. Individuals and religious institutions are allowed to import Bibles and other religious items for personal or congregational use. In addition, religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter are available readily in local shops.

Religious services were held without prior authorization from the Government; however, congregations may not publicly advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses. Christian services are regularly held and open to the public. Some services, particularly those on Easter and Christmas, can draw more than 1,300 worshippers.

Some Christian groups had difficulties finding a place to worship. Religious services were usually held in private houses, schools or hotels; however, since the car bombing in March, school officials have placed more restrictions on some of these groups due to security issues.

The Government did not permit Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, or members of other religions to operate as freely as Christian congregations and they were not allowed to rent space to hold their services publicly. However, there was no official effort to harass or hamper adherents of these faiths in the private practice of their religion.

No foreign missionary groups operate openly in the country. In June 2004, a new criminal code was enacted that established new rules for proselytizing. Individuals caught proselytizing on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation for any religion other than Islam, are sentenced to a term in prison no longer than 10 years. If proselytizing is done on behalf of an individual, for any religion other than Islam, the sentence is imprisonment for a term no longer than 5 years. According to this new law, individuals who possess written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity are imprisoned for no longer than 2 years.

Discrimination in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services did occur, but nationality was usually a more important determinant than religion.

Islamic instruction is compulsory in public schools. While there were no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attended secular private schools. Muslim children were allowed to go to secular and co-educational private schools.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in commercial or civil cases. In 2005, a new panel was established in the courts for Shi'as. The panel decided cases in the following areas: marriage, divorce, inheritance and related disputes. Convicted Muslims may earn points for good behavior and have their sentences reduced by a few months by memorizing the Qur'an.

The official interpretation of Shari'a imposes significant restrictions on Muslim women, including in matters of inheritance and child custody. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands; however, they inherit only one-half as much as male relatives. Non-Muslim wives inherit nothing, unless a special exception is arranged. Shari'a is also applied in cases of divorce. Both parents retain permanent rights of visitation; however, local authorities do not allow a noncitizen parent to take his or her child out of the country without permission of the citizen parent. Women may attend court proceedings. They are generally represented by a male relative; however, they may represent themselves. According to Shari'a, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but the courts routinely interpret this on a case-by-case basis. A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim; however, many make a personal decision to do so. A noncitizen woman is not required to become a citizen upon marriage to a citizen. Children born to a Muslim father are considered to be Muslim.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In May, representatives of Christian churches in the country signed an agreement with the Government of Qatar for a 50-year lease on a large piece of property in Doha on which they intend to erect six churches at their own expense. The churches will pay nominal lease fees of a few hundred dollars a year, renewable after 10 years. The property will include an Anglican church that may also be used by other Protestant denominations, a church to serve 34 Indian Christian congregations, a church for the country's small but influential Coptic community, and a site for two Orthodox churches, one Greek and one Eastern Rite.

The Emir and top government officials strongly support the swift construction and establishment of churches on the ground. The Government assigned a coordinator to speed up the process and facilitate all required building procedures, although some restrictions have been imposed on the use of certain religious symbols on building. Each church was granted permission to apply for visas for visiting clerics to preside over and assist in church services. Authorities encourage church officials to submit visa requests for visiting clerics far in advance in order to facilitate the visits. Non-Muslim religious figures were seen in public, although Qatari society was not accustomed to seeing them in their religious garb.

The Third Conference for Religious Dialogue took place on June 29–30 in Doha. For the first time in the country, representatives from the main monotheistic religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—were invited. Invitations were extended to the Anglican Church, Coptic Church, Middle East Churches Council, Orthodox Church, the Vatican, and Jewish rabbis, among others. A delegation from Israel was invited, and one composed of two former chief rabbis of Israel was named. However, the delegation declined to attend when conference officials (to placate conservative Muslim opinion) said they would not be included in panel discussions. Rabbis from the U.S. did attend and were full participants.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between persons of differing religious beliefs generally are amicable and tolerant. The press and media generally treat non-Muslim religions in a respectful manner. The film "Kingdom of Heaven" about the Crusades was widely advertised and well-received in the country. On a few occasions, privately owned newspapers

have carried articles or cartoons with anti-Semitic content; however, there were no acts of physical violence against or harassment of Jews.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

U.S. Embassy officials met with Government officials at all levels to address religious freedom issues. The Embassy facilitated contacts between religious leaders and the Government, and coordinated initiatives with other embassies to increase their impact.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officials also met with representatives from a number of religious communities in the country to discuss religious freedom issues, including protection of the interests of minority congregations and allegations of discrimination on religious grounds. These issues were brought to the attention of appropriate officials in the Government and on the National Human Rights Committee.

SAUDI ARABIA

The country is a monarchy with a legal system based on Islamic law (Shari'a). Islam is the official religion, and the law requires that all citizens be Muslims. The Government does not provide legal protection for freedom of religion, and such protection does not exist in practice. The public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited. The Government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private; however, it does not always respect this right in practice and does not define this right in law.

There generally was no change in the status of religious freedom during the reporting year. While the Government continued a campaign to foster greater moderation and tolerance of religious diversity, reports of harassment by Mutawwa'in (religious police) increased. The Government enforces a strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam. Muslims who do not adhere to the officially sanctioned interpretation of Islam can face severe repercussions at the hands of Mutawwa'in. Members of the Shi'a minority continued to face political and economic discrimination, including limited employment opportunities, little representation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of mosques and community centers. The Government has stated publicly that its policy is to allow non-Muslims to worship privately; however, this policy has no clear guidelines and is not consistently enforced, resulting in the violation of some non-Muslims' freedom of worship and causing other non-Muslims to worship in fear of harassment and in such a manner as to avoid discovery by police or Mutawwa'in. In contrast to previous years, there was a decrease in both long-term detentions and deportations of non-Muslims for religious reasons; however, there was a marked increase in harassment by Mutawwa'in and in overall arrests and short-term detentions of non-Muslims, which were usually initiated by Mutawwa'in.

During the reporting year, senior government officials made some efforts to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religions and within Islam. The Government convened the fourth session of the "National Dialogue" meeting that included members of different Muslim traditions and men and women. The National Dialogue produced recommendations that included condemning incitements to violence, an end to societal discrimination, educational reform and development of tolerance, and moderation in education. The Government also removed some disparaging references to other religious traditions from educational materials. In addition, journalists continued to publicly criticize abuses by the religious police. Religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society continued, however, during the reporting year, including denunciations of non-Muslim religions from government-sanctioned pulpits.

The majority of citizens support a state based on Islamic law, although there are varying views regarding how this should be implemented.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Senior administration officials continued to raise concerns with the Government, including on specific cases. In 2004, the Secretary of State designated Saudi Arabia as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,225,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 26.7 million, including an estimated foreign population of more than 7 million. The foreign population reportedly includes approximately 1.4 million Indians, 1 million Bangladeshis, nearly 900,000 Pakistanis, 800,000 Filipinos, 750,000 Egyptians, 250,000 Palestinians, 150,000 Lebanese, 130,000 Sri Lankans, 40,000 Eritreans, and 25,000 Americans. Comprehensive statistics for the religious denominations of foreigners are not available; however, they include Muslims from the various branches and schools of Islam, Christians, and Hindus. Approximately 90 percent of the Filipino community is Christian. There are between 500,000 and 1 million Catholics in the country.

The majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims who predominantly adhere to the very strict Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence. The Hanbali school is the strictest of Sunni Islam's four legal schools. In addition, most Sunnis in the Kingdom subscribe to the tradition of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, an 18th century Muslim scholar belonging to the Hanbali school. For this reason, these individuals are often referred to by others as "Wahhabis." Most citizens, however, do not so describe themselves, preferring instead to say simply that they are "Muslims." Many conservative Sunnis in Saudi Arabia, as in other Islamic countries, attempt to follow the practice and example of the first generation of Muslims, known as the "sacred ancestors" or "Salaf" in Arabic. Such Muslims are often referred to as "Salafis." It is important to note that the terms "Wahhabi" and "Salafi" have quite different meanings.

In January and February, the country hosted approximately 2 million Muslim pilgrims from around the world, and from all branches of Islam, for the annual Hajj.

The Shi'a Muslim minority (approximately 2 million persons) lived mostly in the Eastern Province, although a significant number also resided in Medina in the Western Province.

Proselytization by non-Sunni Muslims is illegal and the promotion of non-Salafi Sunni Islam is restricted.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Freedom of religion does not exist. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. Religious freedom is not recognized or protected under the laws, and basic religious freedoms are denied to all but those who adhere to the state-sanctioned version of Sunni Islam. Citizens are denied the freedom to choose or change their religion, and many noncitizens, including Muslims, practice their beliefs under severe restrictions. The Government limits the practice of all but the officially sanctioned version of Islam and prohibits the public practice of other religions.

During the reporting period, the Government publicly restated its policy that non-Muslims are free to practice their religions at home and in private; however, the Government does not always respect this right in practice. As custodian of Islam's two holiest sites in Mecca and Medina, the Government considers its legitimacy to rest largely on its interpretation and enforcement of Shari'a. The Basic Law provides that the Qur'an and the Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammed constitute the country's Constitution. The Government follows the rigorously conservative and strict interpretation of the Wahhabi branch of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence and discriminates against other branches of Islam. During the reporting year, however, the Government for the first time began instructing Saudi judges to base their rulings on all four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, not just the Hanbali school and its Wahhabi branch. Neither the Government nor society in general accepts the concept of separation of religion and state.

The Basic Law sets out the system of government, rights of residents and citizens, and powers and duties of the Government. The judiciary bases its judgments largely on Shari'a, the traditional system of laws derived from the Qur'an and the Sunna. The Government claims that it permits Shi'a Muslims to use their own version of Shari'a to adjudicate cases limited to family law, inheritance, and endowment management. However, there is only one such Shi'a judge serving the country's entire Shi'a population, and he is limited in his ability to apply Shi'a legal tradition in court.

The Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha religious feasts are recognized as the only national holidays. During the reporting year, the Government again permitted the observance of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura in the eastern city of Qatif. Small-scale, public observances of Ashura also occurred in Al-Hasa and Saihat.

Islamic law considers Hindus to be polytheists; identification with polytheism is used to justify discrimination against Hindus in calculating accidental death or injury compensation, unlike Muslims, Christians, or Jews, who are classified as "People of the Book." According to the country's "Hanbali" interpretation of Shari'a, once fault is determined by a court, a Muslim male receives 100 percent of the amount of compensation determined, a male Jew or Christian receives 50 percent, and all others (including Hindus and Sikhs) receive 1/16 of the amount a male Muslim may receive.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Tolerated Islamic practice generally is limited to a branch of the Hanbali school of the Sunni branch of Islam founded by Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, an 18th century Sunni religious leader. This branch of Islam is often referred to as "Wahhabism" outside the country; however, most Saudis do not use this term to describe themselves. Practices contrary to this interpretation, such as celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday and visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims, are forbidden. The Government prohibits the propagation of Islamic teachings that do not conform to the officially accepted interpretation of Islam. During the reporting year, there was an increasing degree of public discussion of the conservative religious traditions. Particularly after the 2003 terror attacks in Riyadh, some writers began to criticize abuses committed by Mutawwa'in (also known as the Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice). However, discussion of religious issues is limited, and the Government has placed temporary or permanent bans on some editors and writers of major local daily newspapers for publication of articles and cartoons critical of the religious establishment.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs supervises and finances the construction and maintenance of almost all mosques, although approximately 30 percent of all mosques are built and endowed by private persons for charity or at private residences. Lawful Shi'a mosques are regulated by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, whose permission Shi'a need to begin construction of new mosques. Imams (prayer leaders) appointed to administer Shi'a mosques operate under the regulation of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Interior. Some mosques are built and supported by the Shi'a community without the Government's support or regulation. Shi'a continued to build mosques and Hussainiyas (gathering places) in private homes, which are sometimes converted to mosques and prayer halls.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs pays the salaries of imams and others who work in the mosques. The Committee to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice is a governmental entity, whose chairman has ministerial status. A separate government committee defines the qualifications of imams.

Since the 2003 terrorist attacks in Riyadh, the Government has taken public measures to counter religious extremism. In February, the Government hosted the first ever Counter-Terrorism International Conference for participants representing 61 countries and international organizations. The Government also sponsored an aggressive public relations anti-terrorism, anti-extremism campaign during the same time. The government-run television network broadcasted a series of programs to combat extremist and terrorist ideology, and senior government and religious leaders, including the Grand Mufti, have spoken out against extremism. The Ministry of Education conducted a "security day" to educate schoolchildren against extremism, and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs is using the Internet to promote moderation and counter terrorist ideology.

The Government bars foreign imams from leading worship during the most heavily attended prayer times, and it prohibits them from delivering sermons during Friday congregational prayers. The Government states that its actions are part of its "Saudization" plan to replace foreign workers with citizens. Writers and other individuals who publicly criticized the official interpretation of Islam, including those who favored a more moderate interpretation than the Government's, risked Mutawwa'in sanctions. Several journalists who wrote critically about the religious leadership or who questioned theological dogma were banned temporarily from writing or traveling abroad.

Most interpretations of Shari'a consider conversion by a Muslim to another religion to be apostasy, a crime punishable by death if the accused does not recant. In 2004, a schoolteacher was tried for apostasy and eventually convicted of blasphemy in March of the same year; the individual was given a prison sentence of 3 years and 300 lashes. The trial received substantial press coverage. There were no executions for apostasy during the reporting year.

The Government prohibits public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risk arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture for engaging in religious activity that attracts official attention. The Government

continues to state publicly that its policy is to allow non-Muslim foreigners to worship privately. However, the Government does not provide explicit guidelines—such as the number of persons permitted to attend private services and acceptable locations—for determining what constitutes private worship, thereby leaving the distinction between public and private worship unclear. This lack of clarity and instances of inconsistent enforcement led many non-Muslims to worship in fear of harassment and in such a way as to avoid discovery by police or Mutawwa'in. The Government often deported those detained for visible non-Muslim worship, sometimes after lengthy periods of arrest during investigation. In some cases, those convicted were also sentenced to receive lashes prior to deportation. In contrast to previous years, there was a decrease in both long-term detentions and deportations of non-Muslims for religious reasons; however, there was a marked increase in harassment by Mutawwa'in and in overall arrests and short-term detentions of non-Muslims. Some former detainees reported occasional government harassment and surveillance following their release.

The Government officially does not permit non-Muslim clergy to enter the country to conduct religious services, although some do so under other auspices, and the Government generally has allowed their performance of discreet religious functions. Such restrictions make it very difficult for most non-Muslims to maintain contact with clergymen and attend services. Catholics and Orthodox Christians, who require a priest on a regular basis to receive the sacraments required by their faith, particularly are affected.

Proselytizing by non-Muslims, including the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials such as Bibles, is illegal, and the promotion of non-Salafi Islam is restricted. Muslims or non-Muslims wearing religious symbols of any kind in public risk confrontation with Mutawwa'in. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs sponsors approximately 50 "Call and Guidance" centers employing approximately 500 persons to convert foreigners to Islam. Some non-Muslim foreigners convert to Islam during their stay in the country. The press often carries articles about such conversions, including testimonials.

The Government requires noncitizens to carry iqamas, or legal resident identity cards, which contain a religious designation for "Muslim" or "non-Muslim." There have been reports that individual Mutawwa'in have pressured sponsors not to renew iqamas, which had been issued for employment, of individuals for religious reasons.

Members of the Shi'a minority are subject to officially sanctioned political and economic discrimination. During the reporting year, authorities continued to permit a greater degree of freedom to Shi'ites in the Eastern Province city of Qatif, overlooking religious practices and gatherings that have been restricted or prevented in the past. However, in other areas with large Shi'a populations, such as al-Hasa and Dammam, there continued to be restrictions on Shi'a religious practices. In February and March, observances of Ashura took place in Qatif, although the police presence outside of Qatif was much larger than in the past. However, there were no reports of police interference with Ashura celebrations. In Qatif's city center, large groups of Shi'a gathered to hear Shi'a clerics speak and to purchase books and other religious paraphernalia. Many Shi'a travel to Qatif or Bahrain to participate in Ashura celebrations because of restrictions on public observances in other parts of the country. The Government continued sporadically to enforce other restrictions on the Shi'a community, such as banning Shi'a books and excluding Shi'a perspectives from the extensive religious media and broadcast programming.

Shi'a have declined government offers to build state-supported Shi'a mosques because they fear the Government would prohibit the incorporation and display of Shi'a motifs in them. In the past, Shi'a have been permitted to build new Hussainiyas in Qatif and Ahsa.

Members of the Shi'a minority are discriminated against in government employment, especially in national security-related positions, such as in the military or Ministry of Interior. While there are some Shi'a who occupy high-level positions in government-owned companies and government agencies, many Shi'a believe that openly identifying themselves as Shi'a would have a negative impact on career advancement. Shi'a are underrepresented in both local and national government; however, Shi'a won a majority of contested seats in certain districts in the Eastern Province during the municipal elections held in March. Shi'a served on the Provincial Councils, the Shura council, in the traffic police, the "mabahith," or internal security force, the Army, and other branches of the military. While there is no formal policy concerning the hiring and promotion of Shi'a, anecdotal evidence suggests that in some companies—including companies in the oil and petrochemical industries—well-qualified Shi'a are passed over for less-qualified Sunni compatriots.

The Government also discriminates against Shi'a in higher education through unofficial restrictions on the number of Shi'a admitted to universities. Shi'a women are

now officially permitted to be school principals, although there are reports that there is currently only one Shi'a woman assistant principle in the Kingdom and no Shi'a principals among the approximately 300 female schools in the Eastern Province. Shi'a teachers are not permitted to teach certain courses in schools, such as history or religion, even in predominately Shi'a areas. While government officials state that textbook language with prejudicial, anti-Shi'a statements has been removed, some teachers have continued to use anti-Shi'a rhetoric. Some cases have resulted in punitive measures being taken against Shi'a parents who have complained. There are no Shi'a cabinet ministers, and there are only 2 Shi'a in the 150-member Majlis al-Shura (consultative council). There are no Shi'a members of the country's highest religious authority, the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars (Ulema).

Under the provisions of Shari'a law as practiced in the country, judges may discount the testimony of nonpracticing Muslims or of individuals who do not adhere to the official interpretation of Islam. Legal sources report that testimony by Shi'a is often ignored in courts of law or is deemed to have less weight than testimony by Sunnis.

Customs officials routinely open mail and shipments to search for contraband, including Sunni printed material deemed incompatible with the Salafi tradition of Islam, including Shi'a religious materials, and non-Muslim materials, such as Bibles and religious videotapes. Such materials are subject to confiscation, although rules appear to be applied arbitrarily.

Sunni Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools at all levels. Regardless of which Islamic tradition their families adhere to, all public school children receive religious instruction that conforms to the Salafi tradition of Islam. Non-Muslim students in private schools are not required to study Islam. Private religious schools are not permitted for non-Muslims or for Muslims adhering to non-Salafi traditions of Islam.

Public debate over reform in the country continued during the reporting year. In December 2004, the Fourth National Dialogue, which focused on youth issues, recommended developing the curricula to cultivate moderation and respect.

During the reporting year, the newly formed National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), the first human rights group which the Government has formally permitted to operate in the country, began to address some human rights violations, though not specifically religious freedom issues.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting year, the Government continued to commit abuses of religious freedom; however, reports of abuses often are difficult or impossible to corroborate. Fear and consequent secrecy surrounding any non-Muslim religious activity contributes to reluctance to disclose any information that might harm persons under government investigation. Moreover, information regarding government practices is incomplete because judicial proceedings generally are closed to the public, despite provisions in the 2002 Criminal Procedural Law that allow some court proceedings to be open.

While there was an improvement in press freedom during the reporting year, open discussions of religious issues were limited. The press reported on debates in the Majlis al-Shura that focused on whether individuals must be Muslim to attain citizenship and included opinions on both sides of the issue. For several years, the Government banned from writing and traveling a dissident Sunni religious scholar whose writings questioned the Islamic establishment's interpretation of the Sunna (the sayings and acts of the Prophet Muhammed). There was also a report that a university professor was banned from teaching for criticizing the Government's discriminatory policies against Shi'a. The professor also was banned from traveling abroad. During the reporting year, the university professor was allowed to resume teaching; however, he was still banned from traveling abroad.

In 2003, the press reported a raid in the Al Jouf region, where 16 Sufis were arrested for possession and distribution of books, videos, and brochures promoting Sufism. In June 2005, the Government also shut down a weekly "majlis," or gathering, held by a Sufi shaykh who adheres to the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence. According to various reports, a number of Shi'a remained in detention during the reporting year.

The Government continued to detain and deport non-Muslims for religious reasons.

In November 2004, Indian Christian Brian O'Connor was deported after being detained for 7 months for religious reasons.

In September 2004, seven Filipino Christian leaders were arrested and detained when Mutawwa'in raided a religious service. All were released within one month,

but Mutawwa'in reportedly put pressure on their employers to deport them. Six had been deported by the end of the reporting year.

In February, Mutawwa'in raided a Christian worship service in Riyadh; those detained and arrested were released within hours of the raid.

In March, Mutawwa'in arrested Indian Christian Samkutty Varghese and confiscated religious materials he was carrying. Varghese was still in custody at the end of the reporting period. There were additional reports of arrests in May of at least eight Indian Protestant leaders following Varghese's arrest, purportedly because he carried information listing other Christians in the Kingdom.

In April, the press reported a raid on Filipino Christian services in Riyadh. Mutawwa'in raided the service and confiscated religious materials such as Bibles and Christian symbols.

On April 21, according to newspaper reports and independent sources, at least 20 Pakistani Christians were arrested during a Mutawwa'in raid on a Christian service. Most or all were released the same day.

On April 29, three Ethiopian and two Eritrean Christians were arrested in Riyadh during a raid on a private service. All five were released after a month in detention.

There also were reports of surveillance of Christian religious services by security personnel.

Magic is widely believed in and sometimes practiced; however, under Shari'a the practice of magic is regarded as the worst form of polytheism. There were an unknown number of detainees held in prison on the charge of "sorcery," including the practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft." During the reporting year, the local press reported several cases of arrests of foreigners and citizens for practicing sorcery. The press also reported raids in June to apprehend individuals alleged to be practicing sorcery. The raids were reported to be part of a campaign to locate illegal residents.

Mutawwa'in practices and incidents of abuse varied widely in different regions of the country. Reports of incidents were most numerous in the central Nejd region, which includes the capital Riyadh. In certain areas, both Mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners. The Government requires Mutawwa'in to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner; however, Mutawwa'in did not always comply with the requirements.

Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior included closing commercial establishments during five daily prayer observances, insisting upon compliance with conservative dress standards, and dispersing gatherings in public places. Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior is more pronounced during the month of Ramadan. Mutawwa'in reproached foreign women for failure to observe strict dress codes, particularly for failure to wear headscarves, and detained men and women found together who were not married or closely related. In the past, the press reported that Mutawwa'in warned shopkeepers not to sell New Year's or Christmas gifts or decorations. The warning also reminded employees not to allow their staff to celebrate either holiday openly. In February 2004, the Grand Mufti restated a previously issued fatwa that declared Valentine's Day a "pagan Christian holiday" that could not be celebrated publicly. Mutawwa'in banned shopkeepers from selling Valentine's Day gifts and decorations and forbade vendors from selling roses 5 days prior to and following February 14. Markets in Qatif, however, carried Valentine's items throughout the year.

Mutawwa'in have the authority to detain persons for no more than 24 hours for violation of strict standards of proper dress and behavior; however, they sometimes exceeded this limit before delivering detainees to the police. Procedures require a police officer to accompany Mutawwa'in at the time of arrest. Mutawwa'in generally complied with this requirement; however, there were cases during the year in which Mutawwa'in violated this requirement. Mutawwa'in may not conduct investigations or allow unpaid volunteers to accompany official patrols; however, there were cases during the year in which unofficial mutawwa'in harassed individuals.

The Government regards members of the large Hindu community as polytheists, and non-Muslim, non-Western religious communities must exercise extreme caution when practicing their religions. The press reported in March that Mutawwa'in raided a makeshift Hindu temple in Riyadh, destroying its temple and forcing worshippers to cease their activities. The Government reportedly deported three worshippers.

During the reporting year, there continued to be instances in which mosque preachers, whose salaries are paid by the Government, used violently anti-Jewish and anti-Christian language in their sermons. Although this language has declined in frequency since the Government began encouraging moderation following the 2003 terror attacks, there continued to be instances in which Mosque speakers

prayed for the death of Jews and Christians, including from the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

During the reporting year, al-Qa'ida terrorists conducted a campaign of terrorist attacks in various locations in the country, killing both Muslims and non-Muslims, citizens and expatriates, and members of the security forces. During the year, terrorists killed more than 30 foreigners and citizen civilians, including 5 employees of a foreign consulate in Jeddah. More than 40 members of security forces were also killed while combating terrorists. Their attacks consisted of kidnappings, targeted shootings, bombings, and beheadings.

Forced Religious Conversion

Under the law, children of male citizens are considered Muslim, regardless of the country or the religious tradition in which they have been raised. The Government's application of this law discriminates against non-Muslim, noncitizen mothers and denies their children the freedom to choose their religion. 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 during the reporting year.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting year, senior government officials made some efforts to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religions and within Islam. In December 2004, the Fourth National Dialogue focused on youth issues and recommended developing the curricula to cultivate moderation and respect.

The Government also took limited measures to remove what it deemed to be disparaging references to other religious traditions from the educational curriculum. In addition, increased press freedom permitted journalists to publicly criticize abuses by the religious police.

Senior leaders, including the Crown Prince and the Grand Mufti, continued to call for moderation. In May, the Deputy Minister of Islamic Affairs was reported as saying that the country protects non-Muslims but does not plan to expand freedom of worship.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

As a deeply conservative and devout Muslim society, there is intense pressure within Saudi Arabia to conform to societal norms. In 2004, a citizen teacher was tried for apostasy. The case received substantial press coverage, but after testimony the court declined to convict him of apostasy and instead convicted him of blasphemy, sentencing him to 3 years and several hundred lashes.

The conservative religious leadership also exerts pressure on the state to adhere strictly to its interpretation of Islam. The Government stated that in 2003 it stepped up efforts to combat religious extremism by firing several hundred prayer leaders and beginning retraining programs for both imams and other mosque employees. Activists who are openly critical of the religious establishment report harassment by religious police and other religious extremists.

The majority of citizens support a state based on Islamic law, although there are differing views as to how this should be realized in practice. The official title of the head of state is "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," and the role of the King and the Government in upholding Islam within the country is regarded as a paramount function throughout the Muslim world.

Following the June 2003 session of the "National Intellectual Dialogue," participants representing different Muslim traditions in the country, including Sunni and Shi'ite leaders, issued a statement acknowledging that theological differences are "natural" and committing themselves to resolve differences through dialogue.

There is societal discrimination against members of the Shi'a minority. The Shi'a experienced discrimination in private sector employment at all levels of society, although this varies somewhat across communities in the Eastern Province. Concerning the hiring and promotion of Shi'a, anecdotal evidence suggests that in some companies—including companies in the oil and petrochemical industries—well-qualified Shi'a are passed over for less-qualified Sunni compatriots.

There continued to be reports of anti-Shi'a discrimination in the Saudi school system. Frequently, teachers in Qatif who teach Islam tell their Shi'a students that Shi'a practices are un-Islamic and that the students must follow Sunni traditions to be true Muslims, though the incidence of this is decreasing. There were reports that teachers instruct their students that the Shi'a are not Muslims, but are kaffirs (unbelievers).

Many non-Muslims who undertook religious observances privately and discreetly during the reporting year were not harassed. However, some non-Muslims claimed that informants paid by Mutawwa'in infiltrated their private worship groups.

Relations between Muslim citizens and foreign Muslims are generally good. Each year the country welcomes approximately 2 million Muslim pilgrims from all over the world and of all branches of Islam, who visit the country to perform the Hajj and Umra.

In certain areas, religious vigilantes unaffiliated with the Government and acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Government policy is to press the Government consistently to honor its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, and promote tolerance toward non-Muslims.

During the reporting year, the U.S. Ambassador discussed U.S. concerns over the lack of religious freedom with a wide range of senior government and religious leaders. The Ambassador also raised specific cases of violations with senior officials, and U.S. Embassy officers met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officials to deliver and discuss the U.S. Government's 2004 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. Senior Embassy officers called on the Government to enforce its public commitment to allow private religious practice and to respect the rights of Muslims who do not follow the Salafi tradition of Islam. In addition, Embassy officers met with MFA officials at various other times to discuss matters pertaining to religious freedom. In 2004, the Secretary of State designated Saudi Arabia as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

SYRIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, it imposes restrictions in some areas.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to monitor the activities of all groups, including religious groups, and discourage proselytizing, particularly when it is deemed a threat to the relations among religious groups. The Government also considers the Jehovah's Witnesses a "politically motivated Zionist organization."

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were occasional reports of minor tensions between religious faiths, some attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 71,498 square miles, and its population is an estimated 18 million. Sunni Muslims represent approximately 74 percent of the population (approximately 12.6 million persons). Other Muslim groups, including Alawi, Ismailis, Shi'a, and Yazidis, together constitute an estimated 13 percent of the population (approximately 2.2 million persons). The Druze account for an estimated 3 percent of the population (approximately 500,000 persons). Various Christian denominations make up the remaining 10 percent of the population (approximately 1.7 million persons). The great majority of Christians belong to the Eastern groups that have existed in the country since the earliest days of Christianity. The main Eastern groups belong to the autonomous Orthodox churches, the Uniate churches, which recognize the Roman Catholic Pope, and the independent Nestorian Church. There are approximately 80 Jews. It is difficult to obtain precise population estimates for religious denominations due to government sensitivity to sectarian demographics.

The largest Christian denomination is the Greek Orthodox Church, known in the country as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The Syrian

Orthodox Church is notable for its use of a Syriac liturgy. Most citizens of Armenian origin belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, which uses an Armenian liturgy. The largest Uniate church in the country is the Greek Catholic Church. Other Uniate denominations include the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, and the Chaldean Catholic Church, which derives from the Nestorian Church. Protestant Christian denominations include Baptist and Mennonite. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) is also present.

Sunni Muslims are present throughout the country. Christians tend to be urbanized, and most live in Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Lattakia, although significant numbers live in the Hasaka governorate in the northeast. A majority of the Alawis live in the Lattakia governorate. A significant majority of the Druze population resides in the rugged Jabal al-Arab region in the southeast, and most are located in the town of Suweida. The few remaining Jews are concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo. Yazidis are found primarily in the northeast.

Foreign missionary groups were present but operated discreetly.

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, it discourages public proselytizing and carefully monitors groups it considers to practice militant Islam. There is no official state religion; however, the Constitution requires that the President be a Muslim and specifies that Islamic jurisprudence is a principal source of legislation.

All religions and orders must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all religious and nonreligious group meetings, except for worship. The registration process can be complicated and lengthy, but the Government usually allows groups to operate informally while awaiting the Government's response.

Recognized religious groups receive free utilities and are exempt from real estate taxes and personal property taxes on official vehicles.

There is a strict de facto separation of church and state. Religious groups tend to avoid any involvement in internal political affairs. The Government, in turn, generally refrains from becoming involved in strictly religious issues. Nevertheless, government policies tend to support the practice and study of moderate forms of Islam. For example, the Government selects moderate Muslims for religious leadership positions and is intolerant of and suppresses extremist forms of Islam. The Government encouraged moderate Islamic voices in Parliament by accepting two devout yet moderate Islamists as independents to the Parliament in the March 2003 elections. In July 2005, the Government appointed Sheikh Ahmed Baderedin Hassoun, the Grand Mufti of Aleppo, as the new Grand Mufti of Damascus. Sheikh Hassoun is known for his encouragement of interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance. Since being appointed to his new role, Sheikh Hassoun has called on members of Islamic sects to stand up to Islamic fundamentalism and has urged leaders of the various faiths to engage in regular dialogues for mutual understanding.

With the exception of contact between the Jewish community and Jews in Israel, the Government generally does not prohibit links by its citizens with co-religionists in other countries or with an international hierarchy.

Orthodox and Western Easter, as well as three Muslim religious holidays (Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and the Prophet Muhammed's birthday) are official national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 1964, the Government banned Jehovah's Witnesses and branded it a "politically motivated Zionist organization" in an attempt to discredit it; however, individual members of Jehovah's Witnesses continued to practice their faith privately.

Although the law does not prohibit proselytizing, in practice the Government discourages such activity, particularly when it is deemed a threat to the relations among religious groups. Foreign missionaries were present but operated discreetly. Proselytizing is not illegal; however, those who proselytize have been prosecuted in the past for "posing a threat to the relations among religious groups." Most charges of this kind have carried sentences of 5 years to life imprisonment, although often such sentences were reduced to 1 or 2 years. There were no reported cases in the last 3 years any prosecution on this charge.

The security services are constantly alert for any possible political threat to the State, and all groups, religious and nonreligious, are subject to surveillance and monitoring by government security services. The Government considers militant Islam in particular a threat to the regime and followed closely the practice of its

adherents. The Government has allowed many mosques to be built; however, it monitored and controlled sermons and often closed mosques between prayers.

The Government primarily cited tense relations with Israel as the reason for barring Jewish citizens from government employment and for exempting them from military service obligations. Jews were the only religious minority group whose passports and identity cards noted their religion. They must obtain the permission of the security services before traveling abroad. Jews also faced extra scrutiny from the Government when applying for licenses, deeds, or other government papers. The Jewish community is prohibited from sending historical Torahs abroad under a law against exporting any of the country's historical and cultural treasures. This created a serious issue for the dwindling Jewish community concerned for the preservation of its religious texts.

Government policy officially disavows sectarianism of any kind; however, in the case of President Asad's Alawi Muslim group, religion can be a factor in determining career opportunities. For example, Alawis held dominant positions in the security services and military, disproportionate to their percentage of the population.

In keeping with the Government's secular policy, the military did not have a chaplain corps, members of the military did not have direct access to religious or spiritual support, and soldiers were expected not to express their faith overtly during work hours. For example, Muslims were discouraged from praying while on duty. Religious minorities, with the exception of Jews, were represented among the senior officer corps. Jewish citizens were forbidden from serving in the Government and armed services and were excluded from mandatory military conscription.

Religious groups are subject to their respective religious laws on marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance.

For Muslims, personal status law on divorce is based on Islamic Law (Shari'a), and some of its provisions as interpreted discriminate against women. For example, husbands may claim adultery as grounds for divorce, but wives face more difficulty in presenting the same case. If a woman requests a divorce from her husband, she may not be entitled to child support in some instances. In the case of divorce, a woman loses the right to custody of her sons when they reach the age of 13 and her daughters when they reach the age of 15. Inheritance for Muslims also is based on Shari'a. Accordingly, Muslim women usually are granted half of the inheritance share of male heirs; however, Shari'a mandates that male heirs provide financial support to the female relatives who inherit less. For example, a brother will inherit his and his unmarried sister's share from their parents' estate, and he is obligated to provide for the sister's well-being with that inheritance. If the brother fails to do so, she has the right to sue. Polygyny is legal but is practiced only by a small minority of Muslim men.

All schools officially were government-run and nonsectarian, although in practice some schools were run by Christian and Druze minorities. There was mandatory religious instruction in schools for all religious groups, with government-approved teachers and curriculums. Religious instruction was provided on Islam and Christianity only, and courses were divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. Groups that participated in Islamic courses include Sunni, Shi'a, Alawi, Ismaili, Yazidi, and Druze. In the past, Jews had a separate primary school that offered religious instruction on Judaism and other traditional subjects; however, the school recently closed due to the dwindling size of the Jewish community. Although Arabic was the official language in public schools, the Government permitted the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic), and Chaldean in some schools, on the basis that these were "liturgical languages." There was no mandatory religious study at the university level.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to hold an unknown number of members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists as political prisoners. Their arrests were motivated primarily by the Government's view of militant Islamists as potential threats to regime stability. Human rights groups estimate the number of those still in custody to be at least several hundred.

During the reporting period, there were two presidential amnesties which released approximately 125 Muslim Brothers and other Islamists from prison.

In 2003, a Presidential amnesty connected to the end of the Eid al-Adha holiday reportedly freed more than 130 oppositionist political prisoners, including many members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect to Religious Freedom

The late Grand Mufti's son Salah Kuftaro and his Abu Nur Islamic Institute continued to engage in a wide variety of activities promoting Christian-Muslim understanding. On May 12, the Council of Middle East Churches visited Kuftaro to discuss Christian-Muslim understanding and future prospects. In November 2004, Muslim and Christian leaders participated in a conference on the subject, part of which was held at the Abu Nur Institute.

In 2005, an American Jewish rabbi visited Syria twice. During his last visit in May, he spoke with both Christian and Muslim religious leaders about the value of religion in building a tolerant and caring society.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were occasional reports of minor tensions between religious faiths mainly attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation. There was little evidence of societal discrimination or violence against religious minorities.

The press, which the Government tightly controlled, generally was careful to avoid publishing anti-Semitic remarks in their anti-Israel articles; however, there was evidence of anti-Semitic articles in previous years. In 2003, an independent production company created and filmed an anti-Semitic program inside the country. Its theme centered on the alleged conspiracy of the "Elders of Zion" to orchestrate both world wars and manipulate world markets to create Israel. The program was not aired in the country but was shown elsewhere. In January 2005, a new edition of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," was published by the Syrian publishing company Dar al-Awail, which credits the Ministry of Information with approving the text. In 2004 and early 2005 there were reports of incidents of harassment and property damage against Jews in Damascus perpetrated by individuals not associated with the Government. There was evidence that local police and other SARG officials did not respond aggressively to these incidents.

In 2003, the usually moderate (now deceased) Grand Mufti issued a statement urging Muslims to use all available methods (including martyrdom) to defeat the US/UK/Zionist "aggression." He declared it was compulsory for every Muslim, female and male, to resist invaders, and that all those close to Iraq should defend it and the Iraqi people. Government officials reportedly did not support his statement.

Although no law prohibits religious denominations from proselytizing, the Government was sensitive to complaints by citizens of aggressive proselytizing by citizens or noncitizens and has intervened when it determined that such activities threatened to provoke sectarian conflict. Societal conventions made conversions relatively rare, especially Muslim-to-Christian conversions. In many cases, societal pressure forced those who undertook such conversions to relocate within the country or leave the country to practice their new religion openly.

There was growing concern regarding a rise in Islamic fundamentalism that could be attributed to a number of political, economic, and societal factors, including the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict and the lure of religious jihad in Iraq.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other Embassy officials meet routinely with religious leaders and adherents of almost all denominations at the national, regional, and local levels. In meetings between Embassy staff and government officials, U.S. officials regularly emphasize the importance of freedom of religion.

TUNISIA

The Constitution provides for the free exercise of religions that do not disturb the public order, and the Government generally respects this right; however, there were some restrictions on religious freedom. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official state religion, and the President must be Muslim. The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion and prohibits proselytizing. It restricts the wearing of Islamic headscarves (hijab) in government offices and it discourages women from wearing the hijab on public streets and at certain public gatherings.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 63,170 square miles, and its population is approximately 10 million. Approximately 99 percent of the population is Muslim. There is no reliable data on the number of practicing Muslims. There is a small indigenous "Maraboutic" Muslim community that belongs to spiritual brotherhoods known as "turuq;" however, there are no statistics regarding its size. Reliable sources report that many members of these brotherhoods left the country shortly after independence when the Government appropriated their religious buildings and land (and those of Islamic foundations). Although these communities are small, the tradition of mysticism permeates the practice of Islam throughout the country. During annual Ramadan festivals, members of these brotherhoods provide public cultural entertainment by performing religious dances. There are also approximately 150 members of the Baha'i Faith.

The Christian community, composed of foreign residents and a small group of native-born citizens of European or Arab descent, numbers approximately 25,000 and is dispersed throughout the country. According to church leaders, the practicing Christian population is approximately 2,000 and includes a few hundred native-born citizens who have converted to Christianity. The Catholic Church operates 12 churches, 9 schools, several libraries, and 2 clinics. There are approximately 500 practicing Catholics. In addition to holding religious services, the Catholic Church also freely organizes cultural activities and performs charitable work throughout the country. In March, the Government permitted the reopening of a Catholic church in Djerba following requests from European nations with substantial tourist travel to the country. The Russian Orthodox Church has approximately 100 practicing members and operates a church in Tunis and another in Bizerte. The French Reform Church maintains a church in Tunis, with a congregation of 140 primarily foreign members. The Anglican Church has a church in Tunis with a few hundred predominantly foreign members. There is a small Seventh-day Adventist community with approximately 50 members. The 30-member Greek Orthodox Church maintains 3 churches (in Tunis, Sousse, and Djerba). On an occasional basis, Catholic and Protestant religious services also are held in a few other locations, such as private residences. There are also 50 Jehovah's Witnesses, of which approximately half are foreign residents and half are native-born citizens. The Government also allowed a small number of religious charitable nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to operate and provide social services.

Judaism is the country's third largest religion with approximately 1,500 members. One-third lives in and around the capital and is descended predominantly from Italian and 16th-century Spanish immigrants. The remainder lives on the island of Djerba where the Jewish community dates back 2,500 years.

Foreign missionary organizations and groups operate in the country; however, they are not permitted to proselytize.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for the free exercise of religions that do not disturb the public order, and the Government generally respects this right; however, it does not permit the establishment of political parties based on religion, forbids proselytizing, and restricts the wearing of the Islamic headscarf (hijab). The Constitution declares

that Islam is the official state religion and stipulates that the President must be a Muslim.

No statutory prohibitions against conversion from Islam to another faith exist, and the Government does not require registration of conversion; however, due to personal bias, lower-level civil servants occasionally discriminate against converts, including using bureaucratic hurdles to discourage conversion.

The Government controls and subsidizes mosques and pays the salaries of prayer leaders. The President appoints the Grand Mufti of the Republic. The 1988 Law on Mosques provides that only personnel appointed by the Government may lead activities in mosques and stipulates that mosques must remain closed except during prayer times and authorized religious ceremonies, such as marriages or funerals. However, several historically significant mosques are partially open to tourists and other visitors for a few hours per day, several days a week. New mosques may be built in accordance with national urban planning regulations; however, upon completion, they become the property of the Government. The Government also partially subsidizes the Jewish community.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Eid el-Kebir, Ras el-Am el-Hejri, Mouled, and Eid Es-sighir. The Government also recognizes the sanctity of non-Muslim religious holidays.

The Government recognizes all Christian and Jewish religious organizations that were established before independence in 1956. Although the Government permits Christian churches to operate freely, it has recognized formally only the Catholic Church, via a 1964 concordat with the Holy See. In addition to authorizing 14 churches "serving all sects" of the country, the Government recognizes land grants signed by the Bey of Tunis in the 18th and 19th centuries that allow other churches to operate. The Government has not acted on a request for registration of a Jewish religious organization in Djerba; however, the group continues to operate and perform religious activities and charitable work unobstructed.

The Government allows the Jewish community freedom of worship and pays the salary of the Grand Rabbi. It also partially subsidizes restoration and maintenance costs for some synagogues. In 1999 the president of the Provisional Committee of the Jewish community and his board of governors submitted registration papers to the Ministry of Interior for permanent registration as the Association of the Jewish Community of Tunisia. Although the Government has yet to register the new association, the president and board of governors continue to meet weekly. During the reporting period, the Government permitted the association to operate and perform religious activities and charity work unhindered.

The Government permits the Jewish community to operate private religious schools and allows Jewish children on the island of Djerba to split their academic day between secular public schools and private religious schools. The Government also encourages Jewish émigrés to return for the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the historic El-Ghriba Synagogue on Djerba. There also is a small private Jewish school in Tunis.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by sponsoring regular conferences and seminars on religious tolerance and by facilitating and promoting the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the El-Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, celebrated on the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omar. In December 2004, the Ministry of Religious Affairs hosted a Colloquium aimed at fostering tolerance among the three Abrahamic faiths and has introduced a university program on intercivilizational dialogue between all major world religions.

The Government also announced that travel restrictions on Israelis would be eliminated, a former Hebraic school would be restored and made into an arts training center for the handicapped, and the Government would help clean up the dilapidated Jewish cemetery of Tunis. In the past, passport restrictions, as well as concerns about possible retribution, discouraged Israelis from visiting, despite the fact that the Government has encouraged foreign Jewish visitors to participate in the Ghriba pilgrimage. The number of Jewish pilgrims to Ghriba in May increased dramatically from previous years; estimates ranged between 3,000 and 5,000. According to local Jewish leaders, approximately 1,000 of these pilgrims were Israeli citizens traveling under the recently relaxed travel policies.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although the Government generally respects the right to practice religion freely, there were some restrictions. Baha'is regard their faith as a religion distinct from Islam; however, the Government regards the Baha'i Faith as a heretical sect of Islam and permits its adherents to practice their faith only in private. The Government permits Baha'is to hold meetings of their national council in private homes, but it prohibits them from organizing local councils. The Ministry of Interior periodi-

cally met with prominent Baha'is to discuss their activities, and Baha'i leaders said that, as a result, their community's relationship with the Government improved during the reporting period.

The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, and it refused to register the Islamist party An-Nahdha and prosecuted suspected party members on these grounds. The Government maintained tight surveillance over Islamists. The Government continued to refuse to re-issue the identity cards it reportedly revoked in previous years from 10,000 to 15,000 alleged Islamists, which among other consequences effectively barred them from legal employment. The Government also refused to issue passports to a number of alleged Islamists. The Government maintained that only the courts possess the power to revoke passports; however, reports indicate that it rarely observed this separation of powers in politically sensitive cases.

Notwithstanding the reopening of the church in Djerba mentioned above, the Government generally did not permit Christian groups to establish new churches, and proselytizing is viewed as an illegal act against public order. Foreign missionary organizations and groups were active; however, they are not permitted to proselytize. Theoretically, authorities deport foreigners suspected of proselytizing and do not permit them to return, but there were reports that the Government preferred to deny suspected missionaries visa renewal not or to pressure their employers not to extend their contracts. However, during the reporting period there were no reported cases of official action against persons suspected of proselytizing during the reporting period.

Both religious and secular NGOs are governed by the same legal and administrative regulations that impose some restrictions on freedom of assembly. For example, all NGOs are required to notify the Government of meetings to be held in public spaces at least 3 days in advance and to submit lists of all meeting participants to the Ministry of Interior.

Religious groups are subjected to the same restrictions on freedom of speech and the press as secular groups. Primary among these restrictions is "dépôt légal," which requires that printers and publishers provide copies of all publications except printed news media to Ministry of Interior censors prior to publication. For publications printed abroad, distributors must deposit copies with the Chief Prosecutor and other ministries prior to their public release. Although Christian groups reported that they were able to distribute previously approved religious publications in European languages without difficulty, they said the Government generally did not grant permission to publish and distribute Arabic-language Christian texts. Moreover, the Government allowed only established churches to distribute religious publications to parishioners. It considered other groups' distribution of religious documents to be an illegal "threat to public order."

The Government discourages the wearing of a hijab in government offices, and there were reports of police requiring women to remove their hijabs in offices, on the street, and at certain public gatherings; however, some female government employees wore hijabs in their offices. The Government characterized the hijab as a "garment of foreign origin having a partisan connotation" and prohibits its use in public institutions to "observe impartiality required of officials in their professional relations with others." There also were frequent reports that police sometimes harassed or detained men with beards whom the Government suspected because of their "Islamic" appearance and sometimes compelled them to shave off their beards.

Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools, but the religious curriculum for secondary school students also includes the history of Judaism and Christianity. The Zeitouna Qur'anic School is part of the Government's national university system, which is otherwise secular.

Customary law based on Shari'a forbids Muslim women from marrying outside their religion. Marriages of Muslim women to non-Muslim men abroad are considered common law unions and thus void when the couple returns to the country. The Government does not permit the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslim men inside the country; however, if a man converts to Islam, he may marry a Muslim woman. Muslim men and non-Muslim women who are married may not inherit from each other, and children from those marriages (all of whom the Government considers to be Muslim) cannot inherit from their mothers.

Civil law is codified; however, judges are known to override codified family or inheritance laws if their interpretation of Shari'a contradicts it. For example, codified laws provide women with custody over their minor children; however, judges have refused to grant women permission to leave the country with them, holding that Shari'a appoints the father as the head of the family, and he must grant permission for the children to travel.

Generally, Shari'a-based interpretation of civil law is applied only in some family cases. Some families avoid the strictures of Shari'a on inheritance by executing sales contracts between parents and children to ensure that sons and daughters receive equal shares of property.

There were frequent reports that the Government did not allow married couples to register the birth of their children and receive birth certificates if the mother was Christian and the father was Muslim and the parents tried to give their children non-Muslim names.

The Government announced that it would help clean up the dilapidated Jewish cemetery in Tunis; government employees were responsible for lawn upkeep of the cemetery, although the Jewish community had responsibility for the restoration of tombs and monuments and large structural rehabilitation.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2004, credible sources estimated that approximately 600 persons were serving prison sentences because of their suspected membership in the illegal Islamist political party An-Nahdha or for their alleged Islamist sympathies; however, there were no reports of cases in which the Government arrested or detained persons based solely on their religious beliefs.

According to human rights lawyers, the Government regularly questioned Muslims who were observed praying frequently in mosques. The authorities instruct imams to espouse government social and economic programs during prayer times in mosques.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

During the reporting period, the public university system for the first time established a department of comparative religion designed to promote broader understanding of diverse religions.

There is great societal pressure against Muslim conversion to other religions, and it is relatively rare. Muslims who convert may face social ostracism.

Despite a history of social pressure by middle and upper class secularists to discourage women from wearing the hijab, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of young middle class urban women choosing to wear the hijab continued to rise during the reporting period. Many observers consider this trend to be less a sign of increasing religiosity among young citizens than a reaction to perceived increasing pressure from on traditional Arab/Muslim culture to modernize.

Privately owned newspapers on occasion published cartoons and articles critical of Israel. Some cartoons used derogatory images of orthodox Jews to portray the state of Israel and Israeli interests. These cartoons were drawn by cartoonists outside of Tunisia and reprinted locally.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Embassy maintains good relations with leaders of majority and minority religious groups throughout the country, and the U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials met regularly with government officials and Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious leaders throughout the reporting period. The Embassy fostered regular exchanges that included components designed to highlight U.S. traditions of religious tolerance and pluralism and regularly disseminated the publication "Muslim Life in America."

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Federal Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of the country.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting year, 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 32,300 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.32 million. An estimated 85 percent of the population is comprised of non-citizens. Nearly all citizens are Muslims, approximately 85 percent of whom are Sunni and the remaining 15 percent are Shi'a. Foreigners are predominantly from South and Southeast Asia, although there is a substantial number from the Middle East, Europe, Central Asia, former Commonwealth of Independent States, and North America. Although no official figures are available, local observers estimate that approximately 55 percent of the foreign population is Muslim, 25 percent is Hindu, 10 percent is Christian, 5 percent is Buddhist, and 5 percent (most of whom reside in Dubai and Abu Dhabi) belongs to other religions, including Parsi, Baha'i, and Sikh.

In late 2001, the Ministry of Planning inquired about religious affiliation in its first federal census. According to a Ministry report compiled in 2003 using data collected during the census, 76 percent of the total population is Muslim, 9 percent is Christian, and 15 percent is "other."

There are foreign missionaries operating in the country. The Government does not permit foreign missionaries to proselytize Muslims; however, they have performed humanitarian missionary work since before the country's independence in 1971. In 1960, Christian missionaries opened a maternity hospital in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi; the hospital continues to operate. Missionaries also operate a maternity hospital in the Emirate of Fujairah. An International Bible Society representative in Al-Ain distributes Bibles and other religious material to Christian religious groups throughout the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Government controls virtually all Sunni mosques, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the freedom of assembly and association, thereby limiting the ability of religious groups without dedicated religious buildings to worship and conduct business. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of all seven of the constituent emirates of the federal union. The Government recognizes a small number of Christian denominations through the issuance of land use permits for the construction and operation of churches. Religious groups without dedicated buildings of worship often use the facilities of other religious groups or worship in private homes. There have been no reports of government interference in this common practice.

The Government funds or subsidizes almost 95 percent of Sunni mosques and employs all Sunni imams; approximately 5 percent of Sunni mosques are entirely private, and several large mosques have large private endowments. The Government distributes guidance on religious sermons to mosques and imams, whether Sunni or Shi'a, and monitors all sermons for political content.

The Shi'a minority, which is concentrated in the northern emirates, is free to worship and maintain its own mosques. All Shi'a mosques are considered private and receive no funds from the Government. Shi'a imams are government-appointed only in the Emirate of Dubai. Shi'a Muslims in Dubai may pursue Shi'a family law cases through a special Shi'a council rather than the Shari'a courts.

The Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf operates as the central federal regulatory authority for Muslim imams and mosques. There is no such authority

and no licensing or registration requirements for the recognition and regulation of non-Muslim religions.

Non-Muslim groups can own their own houses of worship, wherein they can practice their religion freely, by requesting a land grant and permission to build a compound from the local ruler (the title for the land remains with the ruler). There is no federal-level method of granting official status to religious groups or approving land grants. Rather, rulers of the individual emirates exercise autonomy in choosing whether to grant access to land and permission to build houses of worship within their emirates. Groups that do not have their own buildings must use the facilities of other religious organizations or worship in private homes. The police or other security forces do not interfere with gatherings held in private homes.

There are 24 Christian churches in the country built on land donated by the ruling families of the emirates in which they are located. There is one temple for both Sikhs and Hindus operating in a rented commercial building in Dubai. Sikhs and Hindus living in Abu Dhabi also practice their religion in private homes. Four emirates are home to Christian primary and secondary schools. The Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have donated land for Christian cemeteries, and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi has donated land for a Baha'i cemetery. There are two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the Hindu community, one in Abu Dhabi and one in Dubai.

Non-Muslim religious groups do not receive funds from the Government; however, those with land grants are not charged rental payments, and the local rulers grant the land for some religious buildings. In addition, the Emirate of Sharjah waives utility payments for religious buildings. Non-Muslim groups raise money from among their congregants and receive financial support from abroad. Religious groups also advertise certain religious functions in the press, such as holiday celebrations, memorial services, religious conventions, choral concerts, and fundraising events.

Because the official interpretation of Islam considers Christianity to be one of the three monotheistic religions, facilities for Christian congregations are far greater in number and size than those for other non-Muslim communities, despite the fact that Christians represent less than a quarter of the non-Muslim population.

The Government supports in practice a moderate interpretation of Islam; however, as the state religion, Islam is favored over other religions and conversion to Islam is viewed favorably. A list of Muslim converts is published annually. Prisoners who convert to Islam often receive a reduction in their sentences. In Dubai, prisoners who memorize all or part of the Qur'an can receive a reduction in their sentences or a pardon, depending on the length of sentence and the number of sections memorized. Prisoners facing life sentences do not benefit from the memorization program. The ruler of the Emirate of Ajman offers a cash award for prisoners who memorize all or part of the Qur'an.

During the reporting year, the rulers of the various emirates pardoned prisoners on religious and national holidays without regard to the prisoners' religious affiliations. Those pardoned generally are serving sentences from 3 to 5 years for financial crimes, immigration violations, and other minor offenses; pardons reportedly were not extended to prisoners convicted of murder, rape, and kidnapping.

The Government follows a policy of tolerance toward non-Muslim religions and, in practice, interferes very little in their religious activities.

The Government's Religious Adviser, Ali Al Hashemi, regularly represents the country at Islamic, ecumenical, and Christian conferences and events in other countries. Al Hashemi met regularly with Christian leaders in the country. On January 4, the press reported the visit of Al Hashemi to the bishop of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Abu Dhabi to express holiday greetings. On May 2, Al Hashemi and representatives from the Ministry of Justice attended the Easter celebrations of the Egyptian Coptic Church in Abu Dhabi.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Waqfa, Eid Al-Adha, the Islamic New Year, the Birth of the Prophet, Ascension Day, and Eid Al-Fitr. There are no reports that these holidays negatively affect other religious groups because of their religious affiliation. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims and non-Muslims alike are required by law to refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking publicly during fasting hours out of respect for Islamic practice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Federal Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf distributed weekly guidance to both Sunni imams and Shi'a sheikhs regarding subject matter, themes, and content of religious sermons and ensures that clergy do not deviate frequently or significantly from approved topics in their sermons. All Sunni imams are employees of the Federal Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf, or of individual

emirate departments. Except in Dubai, where the Department of Islamic Affairs and Endowments controls the appointment of preachers and the conduct of their work in all mosques, the Government does not appoint sheikhs for Shi'a mosques.

In 1999, land was designated in the Emirate of Ras Al-Khaimah for the construction of a new Catholic church, but at the end of the reporting period, the church had not received permission to open, although construction was completed in 2000. According to a church representative, there are legal issues arising from the church's change to its original building plans that were preventing it from opening. Parishioners continued to hold mass in the Anglican church compound.

There are no Buddhist temples; however, Buddhists, along with Hindus and Sikhs in places without temples, conduct religious ceremonies in private homes without interference. There is one temple for both Sikhs and Hindus in Dubai. There are only two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the large Hindu community, one in Abu Dhabi and one in Dubai. Official permission must be obtained for their use in every instance, posing a hardship for the large Hindu community. The Government does not allow temples to be built on work premises. In late 2004, the Sharjah municipality, on more than one occasion, dismantled temples that were built by Hindu workers in the Qusais labor compounds.

The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing or distributing religious literature under penalty of criminal prosecution, imprisonment, and deportation for engaging in behavior offensive to Islam. While there are no specific laws against missionary activities, in the past the Government reportedly has threatened to revoke the residence permits of persons suspected of missionary activities; however, there were no reports of such threats during the reporting period. On February 21, two foreign women on a mission trip with the Tom Cox World Ministries were arrested by Dubai Police while passing out Bibles and religious CDs during the Dubai Shopping Festival. They were charged with possession and distribution of religious materials (26 CDs and 19 Bibles), and being an "affront to Islam." Dubai Police released the two women within hours of their arrest but confiscated their passports. Both women were allowed to depart the country on March 3.

In December 2004, the press reported the story of a Filipino Muslim convert who was harassed and then terminated by her employer after she converted to Islam and began wearing the Muslim head cover (hijab). A citizen lawyer adopted the Filipino's case, which was not resolved by the end of the reporting period.

The media reported widely on several cases where women claimed private sector employment discrimination due to their decision to wear the Islamic headscarf, or hijab, considered a religious mandate by many Muslim women. Some people called for legal protection for female employees who wear the hijab. The Government did not publish an official position on the issue by the end of the reporting period.

According to the OpenNet Initiative's "Internet Filtering in the United Arab Emirates in 2004-2005: A Country Study," the country's sole Internet service provider, Etisalat, blocked websites containing religious information. These sites included information on the Baha'i Faith, Judaism, negative critiques of Islam, and testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity. The OpenNet Initiative is a partnership between several western universities with projects that study Internet filtering and surveillance practices of governments.

In March, the press reported that non-Sunni parents (such as Baha'i, Druze, and Shi'a) objected to their children taking Islamic studies classes, because the Islamic studies curriculum teaches only about Sunni Islam. A Ministry of Education official responded that Islamic studies are mandatory for Muslims, regardless of their sect. Some Baha'is and Druze have passports that identify them as Muslims, and the Ministry of Education therefore requires their children to take Islamic studies classes.

Immigration authorities routinely asked foreigners applying for residence permits to declare their religious affiliation on residence applications; however, the Government reportedly did not analyze this information, and there have been no reports of religious affiliation affecting the issuance or renewal of visas or residence permits.

Non-Muslim religious leaders have reported that customs authorities rarely question the entry of religious materials such as Bibles and hymnals into the country, unless the materials are printed in Arabic. In the past, customs authorities have questioned the entry of religious materials that they deemed in excess of the normal requirements of existing congregations, although in most instances the items were permitted entry. Customs authorities reportedly are less likely to question the importation of Christian religious items than that of other non-Muslim religious items, although in virtually all instances importation of the material in question eventually has been permitted.

There is a dual system of Shari'a (Islamic) courts for criminal and family law matters and secular courts for civil law matters. Non-Muslims are tried for criminal offenses in Shari'a courts. Not all crimes are punishable by Shari'a penalties. In cases punishable by Shari'a penalty, non-Muslims may receive civil penalties at the discretion of the judge, which generally are provided. Shari'a penalties imposed on non-Muslims also may be overturned or modified by a higher court.

Family law for Muslims is governed by Shari'a and the local Shari'a courts. Dubai has a special Shi'a council to act on matters pertaining to Shi'a family law. Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women "of the book," that is, Christian or Jewish women; however, Muslim women are not permitted to marry non-Muslim men unless the men convert to Islam. Because Islam does not consider the marriage between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman valid, both are subject to arrest, trial, and imprisonment on grounds of fornication. There were no reports of this occurring during the reporting period. Shari'a, according to the Maliki school of jurisprudence, also is applied in cases of divorce. Women generally are granted custody of female children until they reach the age of maturity and are granted temporary custody of male children until they reach the age of 12. If the mother is deemed unfit, custody reverts to the next able female relative on the mother's side. Shari'a, as practiced in the country, permits polygyny.

Islamic studies are mandatory in public schools (schools supported by the Federal Government for primarily citizen children) and in private schools for Muslim children. Religious instruction in non-Muslim religions is not permitted in public schools; however, religious groups may conduct religious instruction for their members on their religious compounds. According to the law, private schools found teaching subjects that contravene Islam, defame any religion, or contravene the nation's ethics and beliefs may face penalties, including closure. In September 2004, the press quoted the Minister of Justice as saying that the existing religious curriculum in the schools contains misinterpretations of some Qur'anic verses and hadiths. The Ministry of Education has begun to adopt the Ministry of Justice's recommended modifications in grades 1-3. The Minister announced that an institute for Islamic Affairs would be established in Abu Dhabi to train preachers and Islamic Affairs students on religious teachings.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting year.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 11, the Religious Adviser unveiled the foundation stone of the Egyptian Coptic Church of the Reverent Antonios, accompanied by the Archbishop of the Orthodox Coptic Church in Jerusalem, the Gulf, and the Middle East. Construction of another Coptic church in Jebel Ali Free Zone started in April.

In late 2004, the Crown Prince of Dubai donated a plot of land to build St. Mary's church for the Greek Orthodox community in Dubai, which is expected to be finished by 2007.

In December 2004, the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf participated in the Christmas celebrations of the Arab Evangelical church in Abu Dhabi. Both the Assistant Under Secretary for Mosque Affairs and the Assistant Under Secretary for Islamic Affairs attended the event and called for religious tolerance.

In October 2004, the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf hosted an international conference on religion and terrorism that was designed to encourage moderation in preaching and condemn extremism and terrorism. Through this conference, the Government hoped to correct misinterpretations of Islam and demonstrate that Islam promotes peace and tolerance. The conference ended with a call for moderate Islamic preaching, increased training of imams, and reforms of the Islamic studies curriculum.

In March, the Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf received Elder Zwick of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to discuss means of enhancing relationships between people of different religions and to confirm the tolerance of Islam as a religion of peace and love.

In October 2004, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, received the Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East.

The Crown Prince said that such visits foster friendship, tolerance, and religious dialogue.

In November 2004, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and other religious communities around the country held several memorial services for the late President Sheikh Zayed and praised his promotion of religious tolerance.

In April, the Minister of Education received Bishop Bernard G. Gremoli, the bishop of Abu Dhabi's Saint Joseph's Catholic Church, to whom he conveyed his condolences on the demise of Pope John Paul II. Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Minister of Information and Culture, attended the Pope's funeral in Rome. The funeral received extensive coverage in the media.

Also in April, President Sheikh Khalifa and northern emirates rulers sent cables of condolences to the Vatican on the death of Pope John Paul II. Sheikh Khalifa lauded the contributions of the Pope in enhancing tolerance between religions. In late April, the President, Dubai Ruler, and Sharjah Ruler sent cables of greetings to Pope Benedict XVI on being elected the new Pope. They expressed their wish for a fruitful dialogue between different religions and cultures to further enhance values of global peace, impartiality, and tolerance. These messages were publicized in the Arabic and English press.

In June, President Khalifa, in his capacity as Ruler of Abu Dhabi, issued a law setting up the Zayed Center for Islamic Culture to foster interreligious tolerance and co-existence and to promote a better understanding of Islam in the West.

In June, Vice President and Prime Minister Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, in his capacity as Ruler of Dubai, established a department of Islamic Affairs and Charity Work. In addition to promoting Islamic culture, including overseeing Islamic publications, the department will supervise the privately funded construction of mosques, issue rulings (fatwas) on Islamic issues, and license prayer leaders, preachers, and instructors. The new department complements the activities of the federal Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqaf.

In May, Sheikh Hamoud Al Hitar, a Yemeni scholar known for persuading Islamic extremists to return to mainstream Islam, visited the country to teach Muslim religious and police officials about his methods.

In January 2004, Ras Al Khaimah Crown Prince and Deputy Ruler Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi met with officials and members of the Indian Orthodox Christian community to discuss opening a church in that emirate. At the end of the reporting period, Ras Al Khaimah had not given the Indian Orthodox church a land grant. Ras Al Khaimah has only one non-Muslim worship center, which various communities rent to conduct their services.

In 2002, the Al Ain municipal government authorized a land grant to the Anglican Church to build a church in Al Ain, but construction had not begun due to a funding shortfall.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Non-Muslim religious leaders from inside and outside of the country regularly refer to it as one of the most liberal and broadminded countries in the region in terms of governmental and societal attitudes toward allowing all persons to practice their faiths freely. While citizens regard the country as a Muslim nation that should respect Muslim religious sensibilities on matters such as public consumption of alcohol, proper dress, and proper public comportment, society also emphasizes respect for privacy and Islamic traditions of tolerance, particularly with respect to forms of Christianity. Modest casual attire for men and women is permitted throughout the country.

Many hotels, stores, and other businesses patronized by both citizens and foreigners are permitted to sell alcohol and pork to non-Muslims and to acknowledge non-Muslim holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Diwali (although such displays generally are not permitted during the month of Ramadan). Shopping centers are festive during Christian holidays, and traditional holiday foods, decorations, posters, books, and videotapes are widely available. School children gather in Dubai malls to sing Christmas carols while Santa hands out gifts. Reports of religious holiday celebrations, including church services, are regularly printed in the media. The largest country carrier, Emirates Airline, brings European tourists to Dubai on "Easter-special sightseeing packages."

Citizens occasionally express concern regarding the influence on society of the cultures of the country's foreign majority. However, in general, citizens are familiar with foreign societies and believe that the best way to balance foreign influence is by supporting and strengthening indigenous cultural traditions.

There were no anti-Semitic or religiously intolerant articles or statements in the English- and Arabic-language electronic and print media. On a routine basis, all media carried articles or statements criticizing the policies and actions of the Israeli government.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Embassy officials in Abu Dhabi and Consulate General officials in Dubai have discussed religious tolerance and freedom with government officials on a number of occasions, and have encouraged the Government to increase religious freedom by permitting the opening or expansion of religious facilities for the large expatriate population. Embassy and consulate officials also help to protect religious freedom by monitoring its status through informal inquiries and meetings with government officials and representatives of Muslim, Christian, and other faiths. In May, Embassy officials met with the bishop of the Catholic Church in Abu Dhabi to discuss religious freedom and the church's mission in the country.

YEMEN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion, and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is the source of all legislation.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Muslims and followers of religions other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs; however, the Government prohibits conversion from Islam and proselytization of Muslims.

Although relations among religions remained generally amicable and continued to contribute to religious freedom, there were some attacks on Jews. Government action against armed insurrections by the "Shabab al-Moumineen," or "Believing Youth" movement, which the Government believes is linked to Twelver Shi'ism of Iran, caused some political, tribal, and religious tension in the country.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 328,080 square miles, and its population is approximately 20 million. Virtually all citizens are Muslims, belonging either to the Zaydi order of Shi'a Islam or to the Shafa'i order of Sunni Islam, representing approximately 30 percent and 70 percent of the total population, respectively. There are also a few thousand Ismaili Muslims, mostly in the north.

Nearly all of the country's once-sizable Jewish population has emigrated. Less than 500 Jews are scattered in the northern part of the country, primarily in the vicinity of Raida and Saada.

There are approximately 3000 Christians throughout the country, most of whom are refugees or temporary foreign residents. There are approximately 40 Hindus, who trace their origins to India, living in Aden. There are four churches in Aden, three Roman Catholic and one Anglican. Aden also has one Hindu temple. There are three known functioning synagogues in the north of the country.

Although there were some non-Muslim public places of worship known to exist in the area of the former North Yemen, they were discreetly located so as not to draw attention. No officially recognized non-Muslim public place of worship exists in areas of the former North Yemen. This is largely because it has no history of a large, resident foreign community such as existed in the south.

Christian missionaries and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) affiliated with missionary groups operated in the country, and most restricted their activities to the provision of medical services; others are employed in teaching and social services. Invited by the Government, the Sisters of Charity run homes for the poor and persons with disabilities in Sana'a, Taiz, Hodeida, and Aden. The Government issues residence visas to priests so that they may provide for the community's religious needs. The Swedish Free Mission (SFM), financed by the government of Sweden and churches in Sweden, runs a technical school for the disabled and poor in

Taiz. There is also a Dutch Christian medical mission in Saada. An American Baptist congregation affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention maintains an affiliation with a hospital in Jibla, which it ran for more than 30 years before transferring management to the Government in 2003. The Anglican Church runs a charitable clinic in Aden.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, however there was some religious tension among Shi'a in the country as well as between the Government and some members of the Zaydi-Shi'a establishment. This tension was a result of Government action against the "Shabab al-Moumineen" armed insurrection that erupted in the summer of 2004 and again in April 2005. The Government maintains that the Shabab are adherents of Twelver Shi'ism, a variant of Shi'ism which differs from that of the country's predominant Zaydi-Shi'as. The Shabab follow the teachings of rebel cleric Hussein Badr Eddine al-Houthi, killed during a 10 week rebellion that he led against the Government in Saada beginning in June 2004. The Government's actions against the group were politically, not religiously, motivated.

Among religious minorities, approximately 1000 Christians and most Jews actively participate in some form of formal religious service or ritual, although not always in a public place of worship.

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 were some restrictions. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. Followers of religions other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs and to wear religiously distinctive ornaments or dress; however, the Government prohibits the conversion and proselytization of Muslims, requires permission for the construction of new places of worship, and prohibits non-Muslims from holding elected office. The Muslim holidays of Eid al-Adha, Muharram and Eid al-Fitr are public holidays. Other religious groups in the country are not negatively impacted by their celebration. The Government does not keep track of an individual's religious identity and there is no law that requires religious groups to register with the State. Jews, Christians and Hindus, the non-Muslim indigenous minorities, may vote but according to a 2001 Election Committee decision, they cannot hold elected office. Chapter 2, Article 106 of the Yemeni Constitution further notes that the President of the Republic must, "practice his Islamic duties."

Public schools provide instruction in Islam but not in other religions; however, Muslim citizens can attend private schools that do not teach Islam. Almost all non-Muslim students in the country are foreigners and attend private schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, there were some restrictions.

In June 2004, the Government used military force to put down an armed insurgency by the "Shabab al-Moumineen" (The Believing Youth) in the northern governorate of Saada. Shi'a cleric Hussein Badr Eddine al-Houthi led the rebellion and was killed in the conflict. In April 2005, the Shabab re-ignited their rebellion in the Saada region, and supporters also conducted violent attacks against Government officials in Sana'a, the capital.

Government actions to counter the increase in political violence restricted some practice of religion. For example, in January 2005 the Government banned the celebration of Ghadeer Day in the Saada Governorate, a holiday celebrated by some Shi'a. The Government also reportedly limited the hours that mosques were permitted to be open to the public, reassigned Imams who were thought to espouse radical doctrine, and increased surveillance and detention of members of the Shabab.

The Government prohibits the proselytization of Muslims. During the year there were reports of persons being temporarily detained for possession of religious materials with the intent to proselytize.

The Government did not allow the building of new public places of worship without previous authorization. At the end of the reporting period, Roman Catholic officials were still waiting for a decision from the Government on whether it would allow an officially recognized Roman Catholic establishment to be built in Sana'a. Church officials did not attribute Government action to discrimination. In February 2004, a previously established church in Aden was allowed to reopen. In June 2004, despite local opposition, the Government permitted a church to raise a cross on top of its building.

Weekly services for Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Christians are held throughout Sana'a, Aden and other cities without government interference. Throughout the country, Christian church and Jewish synagogue services are held regularly in private homes or facilities, such as schools, without harassment, and such facilities appear adequate to accommodate the small numbers involved.

Yemen maintains regular diplomatic relations with the Vatican. In November 2004 President Ali Abdullah Saleh paid an official visit to the Pope. During the reporting period, The Papal Nuncio, the Vatican's nonresident Ambassador to the Yemeni Government, and the Apostolic Vicar to the Arabian Peninsula, Bernard Vicar, also visited Yemen. Public schools provide instruction in Islam but not in other religions; however, Muslim citizens can attend private schools that do not teach Islam. Almost all non-Muslim students in the country are foreigners, and attend private schools.

The ruling General People's Congress (GPC) and the Islah Opposition Party both draw on Islam as a basis for law in their platforms. The ruling GPC does not exclude members of any religion from its membership. Islah requires that a member must be "committed" to Islamic teachings. There are other minor political parties that are Islamic in nature, although it is not clear if they restrict their membership to Muslims.

Non-Muslim citizens may vote but may not hold elected office.

Throughout the reporting period, the Government increased efforts to prevent the politicization of mosques in an attempt to curb extremism and increase tolerance. Efforts concentrated on monitoring mosques for sermons that incite violence or other political statements that it considers harmful to public security. Private Islamic organizations may maintain ties to international Islamic organizations; however, the Government sporadically monitored their activities through the police and intelligence authorities.

During the reporting period, the Government increased its efforts to close unlicensed schools and religious centers. In March, the Government announced that it closed over 1400 unlicensed religious schools. The government expressed concern that these schools deviated from formal education and promoted militant ideology. In 2003, the government ordered the closing of all unlicensed private schools. Private and national schools are prohibited from teaching courses outside of the officially approved curriculum. The purpose of these actions was to curb ideological and religious extremism in schools.

Following the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, owners of property previously expropriated by the communist government of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen were invited to seek restitution of their property. However, implementation has been extremely limited, and very few properties have been returned to previous owners. The Roman Catholic Church was unable during this reporting period to recover restitution for its confiscated property.

The Constitution declares that Islamic Shari'a is the source of all legislation. Some local customs, believed to be part of Shari'a as practiced in Yemen, are codified in various laws and policies. Some of these laws discriminate against women and persons of other faiths.

According to the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, Muslim women are not permitted to marry outside of Islam. Under 1992 Personal Status Law No. 20, men are permitted to marry as many as four wives, although very few do so. The law also forbids men from marrying non-Muslims (except for Jews and Christians) or apostates, those who have renounced Islam. The law requires that the wife must obey the husband, consummate the marriage, and not leave the home without his consent.

Women who seek to travel abroad must obtain permission from their husbands or fathers to receive a passport and to travel. Male relatives are expected to accompany women when traveling; however, enforcement of this requirement was not consistent. Some women reported being able to travel freely without male accompaniment. The Penal Code allows leniency for persons guilty of committing a "crime against honor," a violent assault or killing, committed against females for perceived immodest or defiant behavior. Legal provisions regarding violence against women state that an accused man should be put to death for killing a woman. However, a husband who kills his wife and her lover may be fined or imprisoned for a term of 1 year or less.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In June 2004 the Government issued a press release accusing Jews who live in the north of backing the al-Houthi rebellion in Saada. The Government retracted the statement, carried by the local media, the next day.

Official government policy does not prohibit or provide punishment for the possession of non-Islamic religious literature; however, on occasion there were credible reports that persons were harassed by members of the Political Security Organization (PSO) and by police for possessing such literature (see Section II). There were reports that some members of the PSO monitored, harassed, and occasionally censored the mail of missionary groups and those associated with them, ostensibly to prevent proselytizing.

Under Islamic law as applied in the country, the conversion of a Muslim to another religion is considered apostasy, a crime punishable by death. Around November 2004, authorities in the southern region of Ibb reportedly arrested approximately 20 citizens who were Muslim converts to Christianity or were seeking information about Christianity. Each of the detainees was reportedly beaten, forced to identify other converts and inquirers, and to pay a bribe. All of the converts were released in January 2005. There were no reported cases in which persons were charged with apostasy or prosecuted for it by government authorities.

Police and security forces continued to detain suspected members of the Shabab as well as radical Islamist groups throughout the period covered by this report. Since 2001, the Government has detained several hundred Islamists who returned to Yemen from Afghanistan and/or Iraq "for questioning." Although many such persons were released within days, some reportedly continue to be detained beyond the maximum detention period as terrorist or security suspects.

Throughout the year, the Government continued to sponsor a dialogue with the Shabab and Islamist detainees. The dialogues are led by Islamic scholars in an attempt to arrive at an understanding by which detainees are released in exchange for repentance of past extremism, denunciation of terrorism, and commitments to obey the laws and government, respect non-Muslims, and refrain from attacking foreign interests. The program has had limited success.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The country is predominantly Muslim. Apart from a small but undetermined number of Christians and Hindus of South Asian origin in Aden, Jews are the only indigenous religious minority. Religious minorities generally live in harmony with their Muslim neighbors. However, during the reporting period, Jews faced some incidents of popular anti-Semitism. Jewish visitors to Sana'a reported being attacked by a number of students chanting anti-American and anti-Israel slogans. The students caused damage to their car and kicked them. Jewish children rode to school in a covered truck to protect them from stones. Jewish residents reported being unable to construct official schools or synagogues for fear that they would be destroyed by Muslim neighbors.

Isolated attacks in recent years by anti-Jewish extremists have convinced most of the country's Jews to relocate to the town of Raida for safety and to sustain their community. The Jewish population has diminished significantly over the last 50 years due to voluntary emigration, from tens of thousands to a few hundred.

There were no reported incidents of violence or discrimination between the adherents of Zaydi and Shafa'i Islam, the two main orders of Islam practiced in the country. However, there were reports of slightly increased tension as a result of the political fallout of the Saada insurgency. Religiously motivated violence is neither incited nor tolerated by the Islamic clergy, except for a small, politically motivated clerical minority, often with ties to foreign extremist elements.

As part of its campaign against religious extremism, the Government also took action to improve conditions that affected societal attitudes on religious freedom. In May 2004, the Ministry of Endowment and Guidance conducted a ten-day training course for 700 Imams to promote principles of moderation and religious tolerance.

Christian clergy, who minister to the foreign community, are employed in teaching, social services, and health care.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintained an active dialogue on human rights issues with the Government, NGOs, and others. Embassy officers, including the Ambassador, met periodically with representatives of the Jewish and Christian communities during the reporting period.

SOUTH ASIA

AFGHANISTAN

The country experienced civil war, political violence, religious and political extremism, and misrule for more than 25 years before 2001. In December 2001, the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) took office, and in June 2002, the Emergency Loya Jirga, a gathering of Afghan representatives from throughout the country, elected Hamid Karzai as President of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA). Karzai subsequently formed a Cabinet that featured broad ethnic representation and included women. On January 4, 2004, representatives at the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) adopted a new Constitution that provides for equal rights for women and minorities and reaffirms commitment to international human rights conventions. On October 9, 2004, Afghan voters elected Hamid Karzai as President. All legal religious guidelines adopted under TISA are still applicable. The new Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The new Constitution proclaims that the “religion of the state is the sacred religion of Islam.” It also states that “followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law.” In general, there were fewer reports of problems involving religious freedom than in previous years.

Relations between the different branches of Islam in the country have been difficult. Historically, the minority Shi’a faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. Some conservative elements advocated that a new constitution should favor the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence associated with the Sunnis over the Jafari school used by the Shi’as. In family disputes, courts relied on a civil code that is based on the Sunni Hanafi school, regardless of whether the parties involved were Shi’a or Sunni; the civil code also applies to non-Muslims. Conservative elements also called for the primacy of Shari’a in the legal system. However, the Constitution does not grant preferential status to the Hanafi school, nor does it make specific reference to Shari’a law. The Constitution also grants that Shi’a law will be applied in cases dealing with personal matters involving Shi’as; there is no separate law applying to non-Muslims.

Prior to the fall of the Taliban, the U.S. Government did not maintain an official presence in the country. The Secretary of State designated the Taliban as a particularly severe violator of religious freedom with Country of Particular Concern status in 1999, 2000, and 2001. Since December 2001, when the U.S. Embassy in Kabul re-opened, the U.S. government has discussed religious freedom issues with local officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 251,738 square miles, and its population is approximately 25.8 million. Reliable data on religious demography is not available because an official, nationwide census has not been taken in decades. Observers estimate that 84 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim; approximately 15 percent is Shi’a Muslim; and other religions, including Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews, make up less than 1 percent of the population. There also is a small, low-profile Christian community, in addition to small numbers of adherents of other religions.

Traditionally, Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence has been the dominant religion. For the last 200 years, Sunnis often have looked to the example of the Darul Uloom madrassah (religious school) located in Deoband near Delhi, India. The Deobandi school has long sought to purify Islam by discarding supposedly un-Islamic accretions to the faith and reemphasizing the models that it believes were established in the Qur’an and the customary practices of the Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, Deobandi scholars often have opposed what they perceive

as Western influences. Much of the population adheres to Deobandi-influenced Hanafi Sunnism, but a sizable minority adheres to a more mystical version of Islam, generally known as Sufism. Sufism centers on orders or brotherhoods that follow charismatic religious leaders.

Several regions are religiously homogeneous. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns, centered around the city of Kandahar, dominate the south and east of the country. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras is in the Hazarajat, or the mountainous central highlands around Bamian. Northeastern provinces traditionally have Ismaili populations. Other areas, including Kabul, the capital, are more heterogeneous. For example, in and around the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif, there is a mix of Sunnis (including ethnic Pashtuns, Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Tajiks) and Shi'a (Hazaras and Qizilbash), including Shi'a Ismailis.

In the past, small communities of Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, and Christians lived in the country; however, most members of these communities have left. Even at their peak, these non-Muslim minorities constituted less than 1 percent of the population. Most of the small Hindu and Sikh populations, which once numbered approximately 50,000 persons, emigrated or took refuge abroad during the many years of conflict. However, after the fall of the Taliban, some minorities have begun to return. Non-Muslims such as Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews were estimated to number only in the hundreds at the end of Taliban rule. In 2003, the most recent year for which estimates are available, approximately 3,000 Sikh and Hindu families were living in Afghanistan.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Until the adoption of the January 2004 Constitution, the 1964 Constitution was Afghan law. The judicial system, which is in need of significant reform, will present an ongoing challenge to full and effective enforcement of the 2004 Constitution.

The new Constitution proclaims that Islam is the "religion of the state"; however, it does not prohibit the practice of other religions. The new Constitution also declares "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." It also states that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law."

The licensing and registration of religious groups is not required. Proselytism was practiced but discreetly; there are no laws forbidding the practice even though it is viewed as contrary to the beliefs of Islam. During the period covered by this report, there were no reported incidents involving difficulties of individuals attempting to proselytize. Article 1 of the current, unreformed Penal Code (held over from previous regimes) states that the Code addresses only Tazir (less serious) crimes, and that the more serious categories of Qisas and Hudud crimes fall under Shari'a. Blasphemy and apostasy (converting from Islam to another religion) fall under the latter category, and are—in theory—punishable by death. The Constitution states that any existing laws will remain in place unless either deemed unconstitutional or revised. For the most part, the penal code has not been subjected to review. There were no reported incidents of conversion during the reporting period.

The new Constitution makes no reference to Shari'a, and Article 7 commits the state to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international treaties and conventions to which the country is a party. Although the rights of conversion and proselytism are not spelled out explicitly in the Constitution, both the UDHR and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which the country also has ratified, require protection of these rights. Article 34 of the new Constitution protects freedom of expression and of the press. The Afghan Press Law, adopted in 2002, contains an injunction against information that "could mean insult to the sacred religion of Islam and other religions." The ambiguity surrounding what constitutes offensive material offers the potential for abuse of this clause to restrict press freedom and intimidate journalists. The Afghan Press Law did not require information to comply with Shari'a. However, the section on criminal rules states that if no punishment is prescribed in existing legal codes for crimes mentioned in the press law, then the punishment will be in accordance with Shari'a (Hanafi school). These rules also apply to non-Muslims. The law was reviewed by the Ministry of Information and Culture, and President Karzai signed the amended Afghan Law on Mass Media into law in late March 2004. The Law on Mass Media retains the broad and vague content restriction on "subjects that are contrary to principles of Islam and offensive to other religions and sects," but it excludes any reference to Shari'a.

Only Islamic holy days are celebrated as public holidays. The Government has proclaimed the first day of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Muhammad's birth-

day, and the 10th of Muharram (Ashura—both Sunni and Shi'a) as national holidays. All mark events on the Islamic calendar, and there were no reports that these holidays negatively affected other religious groups. The Shi'a community is able to celebrate openly the birthday of Imam Ali, one of the most revered figures in the Shi'a tradition, as well as commemorate the 10th of Muharram (Ashura), which marks the murder Muhammad's grandson Hussein. There were no reported incidents surrounding Shi'a religious celebrations during the reporting period.

The parts of the educational system that survived more than 20 years of war place considerable emphasis on religion. During the reporting period, the public school curriculum included content on Islam but not on other religions. Non-Muslims were not required to study Islam. Detailed religious study was conducted under the guidance of religious leaders. There was no restriction on parental religious teaching. The Ministry of Education began introducing human rights as a subject in the national school curriculum at the beginning of the school year in March 2003 and extended it nationwide in March 2004. A general curriculum and textbooks that emphasize Islamic terms and principles steadily replaced the preaching of jihad in schools. By the end of the period covered by this report, all schools in Kabul and the surrounding provinces were using the new texts, totaling approximately 15, or just under half, of all provinces.

The Human Rights Commission conducted national consultations on transitional justice, promoted reconciliation at civil society gatherings, and, through various media, continued to receive reports of abuses from citizens. In 2003, the Ministry of Interior established a Human Rights Department to investigate abuses, and this department set up local branches in the offices of chiefs of police. As of May 2005, all provinces have human rights departments to investigate abuses.

There are five or six gurdwaras, or Sikh places of worship, in Kabul, and worshippers generally are free to visit, as threats have ceased. President Karzai visited the Sikh school in the summer of 2002 (co-located with the only functioning gurdwara), after which the Ministry of Education assigned four part-time Dari-language teachers to the school. Shi'a schools are permitted unrestricted operation. There are no Christian or Jewish schools, no Christian churches, and one synagogue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Conversion from Islam is considered apostasy and is punishable by death under Shari'a. However, the new Constitution makes no reference to Shari'a, and Article 7 commits the state to abide by the international treaties and conventions that require protection of this right. During the reporting period, there were unconfirmed reports that converts to Christianity faced societal discrimination and threats and in some cases were killed. The press reported the killings of five male converts to Christianity near the eastern border between June and August 2004, but these reports could not be confirmed. There was no information available concerning restrictions on the general training of clergy. Immigrants and noncitizens were free to practice their own religions. In Kabul, 200 to 300 expatriates meet regularly at Christian worship services, which are held in private locations because there are no Christian churches in the country. Since the fall of the Taliban, no political parties (other than the Taliban) have been banned or discouraged. However, after TISA passed the Political Parties Registration Law in 2003, the Supreme Court banned communists from forming a political party on the grounds that communists are atheists. Christian-affiliated international relief organizations generally operated throughout the country without interference, and there were no reports of incidents of harassment during the period covered by this report. After an attack in late September 2003 that killed two employees of the Voluntary Association for Rehabilitation of Afghanistan, a Taliban spokesman accused the organization and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of preaching Christianity; there were no further details on the attack during the reporting period. There are no known foreign missionaries in the country.

In 2001, the former Department of Vice and Virtue was dissolved and replaced by the Department of Accountability and Religious Affairs. According to the Minister of Hajj and Mosques, no former members of the Department of Vice and Virtue were employed by the Ministry.

Shi'as are permitted to go on the Hajj, and there is no quota system for those making the pilgrimage. Participants are selected by lottery.

Most women in rural areas wear burqas, a traditional full body and face covering; however, many urban women did not wear burqas before the Taliban imposed this practice. Although a number of women in urban areas no longer wear the burqa since the fall of the Taliban, a majority of women continue to do so either from choice or community pressure.

There were a few reports that government forces at local levels prohibited music, movies, and television on religious grounds. In June and July 2004, Kabul and Jalalabad provincial governments banned cable TV, but the ban was lifted. In April 2004, officials in Nangarhar Province briefly banned the appearance of women singers on television; however, the officials' superiors reversed their prohibition. On January 14, 2004, Kabul Television broadcast a female singer for the first time in more than a decade, prompting protests from conservatives on the Supreme Court, who briefly forced the station to stop airing such performances. Moderates in the Government lifted that ban in late January 2004, saying women singers on television were permitted under the new Constitution. Previously, in January 2003, the Supreme Court had banned cable television nationwide on religious grounds, but the ban was lifted in April 2003 when the Government passed a law allowing the resumption of cable services. The central Government has not banned any form of media, and the cable television audience in urban centers continued to expand. Unlike in previous years, televisions, radios, and other electronic goods were sold freely, and music was played widely. For example, Kabul continued to have five radio stations, including the official Radio Kabul. Nongovernmental stations broadcast a mix of Afghan, Indian, Pakistani, and Western music. The stations had no religious content other than brief prayers and Qur'an readings on the government-controlled radio station.

In May, two students were suspended for a year from Herat University for commenting on Islam during a religious debate in ways that classmates and a teacher found blasphemous. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported that shortly after the reporting period, the two students were reinstated at the university with all charges suspended. Following the arrests, the students were released from jail and housed, for security purposes, at various safe houses throughout the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Constitution requires that the President and vice-President be Muslim and does not distinguish in this respect between Sunnis and Shi'as. The Muslim requirement is not explicitly stated for government ministers, but the oath required of ministers suggests adherence to the Muslim faith. The Constitution has no religious requirement for Members of Parliament.

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials occurred. In June 2003, two editors of a weekly Kabul publication were arrested for allegedly violating Article 30 of the Afghan Press Law that prohibits publications of articles defaming Islam. Conservatives within the judiciary recommended the journalists be charged with "insulting Islam" or blasphemy; however, senior Government officials ultimately supported action short of criminal prosecution. Police searched the editors' offices, and the national intelligence agency confiscated the editors' publication, "Aftaab," from stores. Moderates led by the Minister of Information and Culture argued for the release of the journalists and a resolution to the Afghan Press Law—since amended—that permits administrative punishment (a fine) in lieu of prosecution. Within a week, President Karzai ordered the editors released on bail; however, the charges of blasphemy were not dropped. Subsequently, the two journalists obtained asylum outside the country during the second half of 2003.

In January 2003, the Governor of Helmand confiscated approximately 200 Hazara-owned shops in Lashkar-e Gah and distributed them to other town residents. The Governor also blocked the Hazara/Shi'a community from building a mosque in Lashkar-e Gah. While the Human Rights Commission and the UN had reached an agreement in February 2003 with the Governor to compensate Hazara shopkeepers with land elsewhere in Lashkar-e Gah, the Governor had only partly honored this agreement by the end of period covered by this report. The Human Rights Commission stated that the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs failed to complete the agreement, and this case was still open at the end of the reporting period.

In early October 2003, a grenade was lobbed at the only functioning Sikh gurdwara (or temple) in Kabul. There were no casualties. Prior to the incident, local police had warned the gurdwara authorities of a possible attack. Although police and intelligence officials investigated, no suspects had been apprehended by the end of the reporting period.

In an October 2002 incident in Kabul, 28 Tablighi Jamaatis, itinerant lay Sunni missionary preachers, were detained by police for a week. In November 2003, 12 Tablighi preachers were detained for a day in Kandahar. There was no police action against Tablighi preachers during the period covered by the report. The Tablighi claimed their mission was to spread the word of Islam. Some government intelligence officials accused the Tablighi of subversive work for Pakistan. During the period covered by the report, no action was taken against the police who detained

the Tablighi preachers. Although an investigation of the group's activities concluded that the group was innocent of spying for Taliban and al-Qa'ida, no action had been taken against the police officers involved in the case by the end of the reporting period.

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.

In May 2005, news reports indicated that an Indian Hindu converted to Islam. The conversion ceremony was performed before Supreme Court representatives, the Chief Justice and Chief of the Supreme Court, and local and international media. The conversion does not appear to have been forced.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report. There were reports of attacks on non-Muslim international organizations; however, there are no written records to validate the claims.

Attacks by remnants of the al-Qa'ida and Taliban networks continued during the reporting period. Several killings of religious leaders and attacks on mosques were attributed to al-Qa'ida and Taliban members who objected to their victims' links with the Karzai administration and to their public interpretations of Islam.

Unconfirmed press reports claimed that in September 2004, nine boys and a teacher died when a bomb detonated in the schoolyard of a madrassah in Zurmat. The madrassah offered morning Islamic lessons for local boys and, with support from a foreign-funded agency, had added an afternoon curriculum of English, math, and other subjects taught in regular public schools. In addition, the teachers had been involved in helping men and women register to vote. Taliban terrorists claimed responsibility.

On June 1, a mosque in the southern city of Kandahar was bombed during the funeral of an anti-Taliban cleric who had been shot dead 3 days earlier. Twenty persons, including the chief of the capital's police force, were killed. Taliban insurgents were believed to be behind the attacks.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to stress reconciliation and cooperation among all citizens. Although it primarily is concerned with ethnic reconciliation, it also has expressed concern about religious intolerance. The Government responded positively to international approaches on human rights, including religious freedom. The Government indirectly emphasized ethnic and intrafaith reconciliation through the creation and empowerment of the Judicial, Constitutional, and Human Rights Commissions, composed of members of different ethnic and Muslim religious (Sunni and Shi'a) groups. The Constitutional Commission also included a Hindu member to represent non-Muslim religious minorities. Sikh and Hindu leaders were consulted regularly during the preparation of the draft constitution and elected three delegates, including a woman, to the CLJ.

During the reporting period, the Government included Hazara and other Shi'a figures, such as the Minister of Martyrs and the Disabled Sidiqa Balkhi, Minister of Public Works Suhrab Ali Safari, Minister of Transportation Hinayatullah Qasimi, Minister of Justice Mohammad Sarwar Danish, Second Vice President Karim Khalili, and Minister of Higher Education Sayed Amirshah Hasanyar.

During the period covered by this report, the Human Rights Commission continued to conduct national consultations on transitional justice, promoted reconciliation at civil society gatherings and through various media, and continued to receive reports of abuses from citizens. In April 2003, the Ministry of Interior established a Human Rights Department to investigate human rights abuses, and this department set up local branches in the offices of Chiefs of Police in all but three provinces. By the end of this reporting period, all provinces had a Human Rights Department to investigate human rights abuses.

The Human Rights Commission also advocated for the rights of Sikhs and Hindus, when this community complained in late 2003 that it was being denied access to its traditional cremation ground in Kabul by local residents. The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs was also sympathetic and responded to this complaint. In March 2004, Kabul municipal authorities allocated an alternative cremation site to the Sikh-Hindu community. This new site was in use at the end of the period covered by this report.

During the reporting period, the Government provided guards for the five or six unused Sikh gurdwaras in Kabul, as well as a shuttle for worshippers. In the summer of 2002, President Karzai visited the Sikh school (co-located with the only functioning gurdwara), after which the Ministry of Education assigned four part-time Dari language teachers to the school.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the different branches of Islam in the country have been difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a faced discrimination from the Sunni population. However, in view of an increase in Shi'a representation in government, there is less hostility from Sunnis. Most Shi'a are members of the Hazara ethnic group, which traditionally has been segregated from the rest of society for a combination of political, ethnic, and religious reasons. Throughout the country's history, there have been many examples of conflicts between the Hazaras and other citizens. These conflicts often have had economic and political roots but also have acquired religious dimensions. The treatment of Shi'a varied by locality; however, the active persecution of the Shi'a minority, including Ismailis, under the Taliban regime has ended, and, although some discrimination continues at the local level, Shi'a generally are free to participate fully in public life. The rigid policies adopted both by the Taliban and by certain opposition groups adversely affected adherents of other branches of Islam and other religions.

Non-Muslim minorities such as Sikhs and Hindus continue to face social discrimination and harassment; however, this circumstance is not systematic, and the Government is trying to address their concerns. During the reporting period, some Sikh and Hindu children were not attending schools due to harassment from teachers and students. The Government has not taken any measures to protect these children and reintegrate them into the classroom environment. There were no reports, either confirmed or unconfirmed, of discrimination toward Christians in schools.

After the fall of the Taliban, there continued to be episodic reports of persons at the local level using coercion to enforce social and religious conformity. During the reporting period, President Karzai and other moderates in the central Government opposed attempts by conservative elements to enforce rules regarding social and religious practices based on their interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban's religious police force, the Department of Vice and Virtue, was replaced by the Department of Accountability and Religious Affairs, with a stated goal of promoting "Islamic values"; however, the department lacks any enforcement or regulatory authority.

The practice of forced chastity examinations has reportedly decreased. In 2004, the AIHRC intervened and aggressively launched programs designed to educate all levels of society in the provinces where forced chastity was practiced. The AIHRC conducted surveys in late 2004 that indicated that the practice has declined significantly. However, in Herat, there were continued reports of forced chastity examinations by religious police of women found with males who were not their relatives; however, reports declined during the latter months of the reporting period. It was difficult to know whether this practice was systematic or sporadic, sometimes at the request of family members and in the context of an extremely conservative environment. There were no reports of examinations directed at non-Muslims. Local officials also confronted women over their attire and behavior, although there were no known official policies mandating the wearing of the burqa or regulating the activities of women.

In May 2003, Habibullah, a Muslim cleric with close ties to President Karzai, was shot and killed outside a mosque in Deh Rawood district. Six persons were detained in connection with the killing. President Karzai issued a statement condemning the murder. By the end of the reporting period, there were no arrests and no further information on this case, including on the persons originally detained.

In May 2003, a well-known religious scholar, Mowlawi Haji Abdollah, was shot and killed after leaving a mosque after prayers in central Uruzgan Province. The Government said that remnants of the Taliban and al-Qa'ida were responsible for the crime. The assailants had not been identified by the end of period covered by this report.

In June 2003, a mosque in Kandahar was bombed during the final prayer of the day, and 16 worshippers were wounded. The leader of the mosque and head of Kandahar's Ulema-u-Shura (clerics' council), Mullah Abdullah Fayaz, had stated that the Taliban were not following Islam and that their interpretation of Islam was wrong. The Ministry of the Interior stated that two persons were arrested, one in July 2003 and the other in August 2003. As of May 2005, the MOI stated that the former was in custody pending investigations and the latter was still escaped.

In April 2004, Maulana Abdul Bari, a former Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs in Kandahar, was shot and killed outside his home by suspected Taliban members. At the end of the reporting period, there had been no arrests in the case, which continued to be under investigation.

During the second half of 2004, two mullahs were killed in Ghazni and Muqar provinces. In March 2005, a person in Helmand Province was beheaded for his religious beliefs. No one was charged with the killings.

NGOs reported and the AIHRC confirmed that on September 7, 2004, a large mob attacked several offices and vehicles of NGOs, including the Agha Khan Development Network, in Faizabad in Badakhshan Province. The attack appeared to have responded to rumors that the Agha Khan Development Network was using its aid projects to convert Sunni Muslims and that two women workers were raped at the NGOs' offices. The AIHRC also cited unconfirmed reports of rocket attacks on NGOs in Faizabad during that and other incidents.

On May 9, 2005, Newsweek magazine reported that U.S. interrogators desecrated the Qur'an at Guantanamo Bay. The report sparked demonstrations throughout the country, which resulted in the deaths of 17 persons. Another 120 persons were wounded. A local newspaper reported that an Islamic group reportedly linked to the ousted Taliban regime declared jihad, or holy war, against U.S.-led troops and the Government over the alleged Qur'an desecration.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Government has worked with the Government to promote human rights and religious and ethnic tolerance from the inclusion of minority groups in the Government and military to assistance in the reconstruction of the country and its legal and political processes. During 2003, the United States provided \$600,000 (25,800,000 Afghani) for technical assistance and capacity building for the Human Rights Commission. The United States provided an additional \$5 million (215 million Afghani) to the commission during the reporting period. Embassy representatives meet daily with government officials and routinely with religious and minority figures in an ongoing dialogue regarding the political, legal, religious, and human rights context of the country's reconstruction.

The AIHRC continued providing technical assistance and capacity building from the U.S. Government. It received \$5 million (215 million Afghani) in 2003.

U.S. Government officials supported efforts during the CLJ to include specific language in the draft constitution to provide for equal rights for men and women and to incorporate moderate language on Islam.

The U.S. Government has also worked with civil society organizations to promote religious tolerance. The Civil Development Foundation, a group of reformist, largely Shi'a, citizens, continued to publish the monthly magazine, Democracy, a project funded by a U.S. grant of \$68,843 (3 million Afghani) to cover expenses from July 2004 to April 2005. One of the goals of Democracy is to challenge "religious despotism" and to promote a liberal and tolerant interpretation of Islam. Other U.S. grants also helped to establish independent community and commercial radio stations throughout the country that broadcast programs on a range of topics including democracy and human rights issues. During this reporting period, the U.S. continued providing support to radio stations throughout the country.

Between March and July 2004, the U.S. Government funded a visit to the United States of 25 mullahs under a program on "Democracy and Civil Society." The approximate cost of this program was \$250,000 (10,750,000 Afghani).

BANGLADESH

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to practice—subject to law, public order, and morality—the religion of one's choice. The Government's respect for religious freedom was inconsistent, and due to the action of extremists, the year was marked with harassment and violent attacks against the Ahmadiyya community. Religion exerts a powerful influence on politics, and the Government is sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of its political allies and the majority of its citizens.

Citizens generally are free to practice the religion of their choice; however, police are normally ineffective in upholding law and order and are often slow to assist members of religious minorities who have been victims of crimes. Although the Gov-

ernment states that acts of violence against members of religious minority groups are politically or economically motivated and cannot be solely attributed to religion, religiously motivated violence was a continuing problem.

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities experienced discrimination by the Muslim majority, and the year was marked with harassment of Ahmadis. During the period covered by this report, the Government was led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which heads a four-party coalition that includes two Islamic parties, Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote. A large majority of Hindus traditionally votes for the opposition Awami League (AL). In the 300-seat Parliament, religious minorities hold 7 seats—4 for the AL and 3 for BNP. Three non-Muslims hold deputy or state minister or equivalent positions in the Government. The acute animosity between the two mainstream political parties often leads to politically motivated violence and sometimes heightened societal tensions between Muslims and Hindus.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. After the April attacks on Ahmadis, the Ambassador visited the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dhaka to show support for their security and religious freedom. Assistant Secretary for South Asia and Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia also visited the Ahmadiyya headquarters during their trips to the region in 2005 to emphasize the importance the United States places on religious freedom. Undersecretary for Political Affairs also stressed the protection of Ahmadis during official meetings.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,126 square miles, and its population is 141 million. Sunni Muslims constitute 88 percent of the population. Approximately 10 percent of the population is Hindu. The remainder is mainly Christian (mostly Catholic) and Buddhist. Ethnic and religious minority communities often overlap and are concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern regions. Buddhists are found predominantly among the indigenous (non-Bengali) populations of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Bengali Christians can be found in many communities across the country and some indigenous groups in various areas are also Christian. There also are small populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their numbers vary from a few thousand to 100,000 adherents for each faith. There is no known indigenous Jewish community. Anti-Semitic attitudes are widespread and are sometimes evident in commentaries, particularly on the Middle East, in mainstream newspapers. Religion is an important part of community identity for citizens, including those who do not participate actively in prayers or services.

A national survey in late 2003 confirmed that religion is the first choice by a citizen for self-identification; atheism is extremely rare.

There is no reliable estimate of the number of missionaries, but several Christian denominations operate schools, orphanages, or other social programs throughout the country. A substantial number of missionaries, primarily based in Dhaka and Chittagong, are engaged in social development projects. Several faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including World Vision and Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) International, operate in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides for the right to practice—subject to law, public order, and morality—the religion of one's choice.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the Government; however, all NGOs, including religious organizations, are required to register with the Government's NGO Affairs Bureau if they receive foreign financial assistance for social development projects. The Government has the legal authority to cancel the registration of an NGO determined or suspected to be in breach of its legal or fiduciary obligations and to take other actions, such as blocking foreign funds transfers, to hinder its operation. During the period covered by last year's report, the Government took action in a nontransparent manner against six NGOs perceived as anti-government or pro-opposition. In September 2003, one such NGO was closed temporarily after a government official claimed it had too many Hindus on its board of directors; however, it subsequently reopened. Another prominent NGO had its outside grants blocked after its director in 2001 wrote to the head of government and the diplomatic community to express concern over attacks on minorities during the

election campaign then underway. Ultimately, the blocked grants expired in early 2004 and were not renewed until early 2005, when the Government released the funds and enabled the NGO to receive outside grants. Members of targeted NGOs reported harassment and intimidation, including pressure against traveling abroad to participate in religious freedom events, by law enforcement and intelligence officials.

The law neither permits citizens to proselytize nor prohibits proselytism; however, local authorities and communities often object to efforts to convert persons from Islam. Strong social resistance to conversion from Islam means that most missionary efforts by Christian groups are aimed at serving communities that have been Christian for several generations or longer.

Shari'a is not implemented formally. In 2001, the High Court ruled illegal all fatwas, or legal rulings on Islamic law. Fatwas include decisions as to when holidays begin based upon the sightings of the moon, matters of marriage and divorce, the meting out of punishments for perceived moral transgressions, and other religious issues. Islamic tradition dictates that only those muftis (religious scholars) who have expertise in Islamic law are authorized to declare a fatwa.

Family laws concerning marriage, divorce, and adoption differ slightly depending on the religion of the person involved. There are no legal restrictions on marriage between members of different faiths.

Religion exerts a powerful influence on politics, and the Government is sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of its political allies, Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote, as well as the majority of its citizens.

The Government provides some monetary support for the development of mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples, and churches.

Major religious festivals and holy days of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian faiths are celebrated as national holidays. The Bangladesh Christian Association has lobbied unsuccessfully for the inclusion of Easter as a national holiday.

Religion is taught in government schools, and parents have the right to have their children taught in their own religion; however, some claim that many government-employed religious teachers of minority religions are neither members of the religion they teach nor qualified to teach it. Although transportation may not always be available for children to attend religion classes away from school, in practice schools with few religious minority students often work out arrangements with local churches or temples, which then direct religious studies outside of school hours. There are at least 25,000 Muslim religious schools, or madrassahs, some government funded and some privately funded and run, according to a recent US Government study. There are no known government-run Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist schools.

The Government has taken steps to promote interfaith understanding. For example, government leaders issued statements on the eve of religious holidays calling for peace and warning that action would be taken against those attempting to disrupt the celebrations. Through additional security deployments and public statements, the Government promoted the peaceful celebration of Durga Purja, a major Hindu holiday in October 2004, and supported peaceful activities during Ramadan and before Eid Al-Azha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Despite the High Court's 2001 decision to rule all fatwas illegal, in practice village religious leaders sometimes make declarations in individual cases and call the declaration a fatwa. Sometimes this results in extrajudicial punishments, often against women for their perceived moral transgressions. In deeming all fatwas illegal, the High Court intended to end the extrajudicial enforcement of fatwas or other declarations by religious leaders. The pronouncement resulted in violent public protests. Several weeks later, the Appellate Court stayed the High Court's ruling, and subsequently no action has been taken. Given the heavy Appellate Court case load, it is unclear when the appeal will be considered.

The Constitution provides for the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion; however, the right to proselytize is not discussed in the Constitution. Proselytism is neither permitted nor prohibited by law. Foreign missionaries were allowed to work; however, their right to proselytize is not protected by the Constitution. As is the case with other foreign residents, missionaries often face delays of several months in obtaining or renewing visas. In the past, some missionaries who were perceived to be converting Muslims to other faiths were unable to renew their visas, which must be renewed annually. In 2001, the Department of Immigration and Passports began to regularly issue a new type of visa for foreign missionaries. The processing of the new visas initially created complications; however, during the period covered by the report, there were no reports of current problems with obtain-

ing these visas. Some foreign missionaries reported that internal security forces and others closely monitored their activities.

There are no financial penalties imposed on the basis of religious beliefs; however, religious minorities are disadvantaged in practice in such areas as access to jobs in government or the military, and in political office. The Government has appointed some Hindus to senior civil service positions. Non-Muslims are not barred legally from any government position. However, religious minorities remain underrepresented in most government jobs, especially at the higher levels of the civil and foreign services. Selection boards in the government services often lacked minority group representation. The government-owned Bangladesh Bank employs approximately 10 percent non-Muslims in its upper ranks. Hindus dominate the teaching profession. Some Hindus report that Muslims tend to favor Hindus in some professions, such as doctors, lawyers, and accountants. They attribute this circumstance to the education that the British offered during the 19th century, which Muslims boycotted but Hindus embraced. Employees are not required to disclose their religion, but it generally can be determined by a person's name.

Many Hindus have been unable to recover landholdings lost because of discrimination in the application of the law, especially under the now-defunct Vested Property Act. The act was an East Pakistan-era law that allowed "enemy" (in practice Hindu) lands to be expropriated by the Government. Approximately 2.5 million acres of land were seized from Hindus, and almost all of the 10 million Hindus in the country were affected. Property ownership, particularly among Hindus, has been a contentious issue since partition from India in 1947. However, in April 2001, Parliament passed the Vested Property Return Act. This law stipulated that land remaining under government control that was seized under the Vested Property Act be returned to its original owners, provided that the original owners or their heirs remain resident citizens. Hindus who fled to India and resettled there are not eligible to have their land returned, and the act does not provide for compensation for or return of properties that the Government has sold. By law, the Government was required to prepare a list of vested property holdings by October 2001, and claims were to have been filed within 90 days of the publication date. However, by the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not published the list of vested properties; the reasons for the extended delay could not be determined.

In 2002, Parliament passed an amendment to the Vested Property Return Act, allowing the Government unlimited time to return the vested properties. The properties are to remain under the control of deputy commissioners until a tribunal settles ownership. The amendment also gives the deputy commissioners the right to lease such properties until they are returned to their owners. The Government claimed that this provision would prevent the properties from being stolen.

Marriage rituals and proceedings are governed by the family law of the religion of the parties concerned; however, marriages are also registered with the state. Under the Muslim Family Ordinance, female heirs inherit less than male relatives, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands. Men are permitted to have up to four wives, although society strongly discourages polygamy, and it is rarely practiced. Laws provide some protection for women against arbitrary divorce and the taking of additional wives by husbands without the first wife's consent, but the protections generally apply only to registered marriages. In rural areas, marriages sometimes are not registered because of ignorance of the law. Under the law, a Muslim husband is required to pay his former wife alimony for 3 months, but this law is not always enforced.

In December 2003, anti-Ahmadi activists killed a prominent Ahmadi leader in Jessore and announced a January 23, 2004, deadline for the Government to declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. On January 8, 2004, the Government announced a ban on all Ahmadi publications. The ban has not been formalized, but police detained a boy for 3 days for possession of Ahmadi books, and during demonstrations in April and May 2004, police entered and from two Ahmadi mosques and seized documents. On December 21, 2004, the Government printed a Gazette banning Ahmadi publications but did not release it. After local human rights activists and Ahmadi leaders filed a writ petition challenging the Gazette, the High Court stayed the ban. The Government has opposed court challenges to the ban on the grounds the ban has not been promulgated officially and is, therefore, beyond judicial scrutiny. With a few exceptions, police are not enforcing the ban.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Reports of BNP harassment of Hindus, who traditionally vote for the AL, preceded and followed the 2001 election. Reported incidents included killings, rape, looting, and torture. The BNP acknowledged reports of atrocities committed between Muslims and Hindus; but claimed that they were exaggerated. The Home Minister

was unable to confirm reports that Hindus had fled the country and insisted that there was no link between religion and the violence. He also dismissed allegations that the BNP was linked to the perpetrators. In 2001, the High Court ordered the Government to investigate and report on attacks on religious minorities and to demonstrate that it was taking adequate steps to protect them. The Government submitted its report to the High Court in 2002. The report claimed that some of the incidents of post-election violence were not connected to communal relations, and that some reports of violence were fabricated or exaggerated. Since then neither the High Court nor the Government has taken further action. There was no religiously related political violence surrounding the Chittagong elections in May.

Since the 2001 elections, religious minorities reportedly have continued to be targeted for attacks, which has led to the requirement for guards to be present at church and temple ceremonies. Reportedly, incidents include killings, rape, torture, attacks on places of worship, destruction of homes, forced evictions, and desecration of items of worship. These claims continued during the period covered by this report. However, many such reports have not been verified independently, and there also has been violence during important Muslim holidays. The Government sometimes has failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who are often local gang leaders.

In June 2001, in Baniarchar, Gopalganj District, a bomb exploded inside a Catholic church during Sunday Mass, killing 10 persons and injuring 20 others. The army arrived to investigate approximately 10 hours after the blast. Police detained various persons for questioning, but by the end of the period covered by this report, the police reported no progress on the case. A judicial commission was formed in December 2001 to investigate the bombing. In September 2002, the commission submitted its report to the Government. The commission's report blamed Sheikh Hasina and other AL party members for six of the seven bomb attacks that occurred in 1999, 2000, and 2001, including the June 2001 attack. However, two of the three commission members dissented, alleging that the head of the commission, Judge Abdul Bari Sarkar, had inserted his personal views in the final report. During the period covered by this report, the Government took no further action on the basis of the 2002 commission report, and the police were not pursuing the case actively.

In 2002, a Buddhist monk, Ganojyoti Mohasthobir, was killed at a Buddhist temple and orphanage at Rauzan in Chittagong. According to media reports, his killing was related to a land dispute. Then former Home Minister and Foreign Minister visited the temple after the killing. They assured the public that the incident would be investigated properly and that those involved would be brought to trial. Police subsequently apprehended three of the seven suspected in the killing. At the end of the period covered by this report, seven individuals had been convicted and given the death sentence. The convicted had appeals pending in the High Court.

In 2003, 11 members of a Hindu family burned to death after assailants set fire to their home near the port city of Chittagong. BDG officials ascribed the crime to robbers following a failed robbery attempt, but the opposition Awami League alleged that BNP members attacked the family as part of a local anti-Hindu cleansing effort. A local human rights NGO claimed that the attack was a planned assault on the family because of its Hindu faith. Government ministers visited the home within a few days of the incident and promised action against the perpetrators. Within a month of the attack police arrested 5 persons, 3 of whom confessed to the magistrate and claimed that 14 persons were involved in what they said was an attempted robbery. At the conclusion of the period covered by this report, police have submitted their investigations to court twice but the Public Prosecutor has declared the investigations "faulty," so a third round of investigation was in process.

On February 27, 2004, Humayun Azad, a Dhaka University professor and writer, sustained serious injuries when unidentified assailants stabbed him near campus. Azad, known for his criticism of Islamic fundamentalism, publicly blamed the attack on Muslim extremists. The Government provided Azad with medical treatment in Dhaka and later, at its expense, in Thailand, but at the end of the period covered by this report, the police investigation into the attack had not identified the assailants. Azad died of an apparent heart attack in Germany on August 13, 2004, and were no new developments in his case.

Feminist author Taslima Nasreen remained abroad during the period covered by this report, while criminal charges were pending against her for allegedly insulting the religious beliefs of the country's Muslims. In May 2002, the Government banned one of her books, a sequel to an earlier novel that also was banned for being "anti-Islamic." In October 2002, a court sentenced Nasreen, in absentia, to a year in jail for her "derogatory remarks about Islam," in a case filed by a local Jamaat-e-Islami leader in 1999. In November 2003, a Dhaka court banned the sale or distribution of Nasreen's latest book, "Ka," an account of Nasreen's relationships with local intel-

lectuals, in response to a defamation suit filed by a local writer; however, “Ka” was sold openly on street corners after the ban.

There were several bombings in 2004 and one in 2005, on February 20, at Muslim shrines in the Sylhet area. On May 21, 2004, the British High Commissioner was seriously injured by an explosion as he visited the Shahjalal Shrine.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report. On February 15 and 16, firebomb attacks on two social development NGOs, which extremists viewed as “un-Islamic,” left at least eight workers injured. On February 23, the Government banned two Islamic extremist groups, Jammāt ul Mujahēedīn (JM) and the Jagrato Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), for their alleged complicity. There were no reports that either group targeted non-Muslims or Ahmadis.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Following demands by the Islami Okiyya Jote, an Islamist coalition partner of the ruling BNP, that Ahmadi publications be banned and that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims, the Government announced such a ban on January 8, 2004. However, several days later, the Prime Minister announced the Government would not declare Ahmadis non-Muslims.

In the fourth quarter of 2004, the Government took a more active stance against the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh (IKNMB), which spearheads anti-Ahmadi agitation, stopping two planned marches on the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dhaka by an effective combination of political pressure and police deployments. At government direction, police in Ahmadiyya communities also became more active in protecting Ahmadis. However, in other cases, police did not stop extremist demonstrators from placing provocative signboards at Ahmadi mosques.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between religious communities generally are amicable. Persons who practice different religions often join each other’s festivals and celebrations, such as weddings. Shi’a Muslims practice their faith without interference from Sunnis. Nevertheless, clashes between religious groups occasionally occur. Violence directed against religious minority communities continues to result in the loss of lives and property, but the motives—religious animosity, criminal intent, or property disputes—are often unclear. Religious minorities are vulnerable due to their relatively limited influence with political elites. Like many citizens, they are often reluctant to seek recourse from a corrupt and ineffective criminal justice system. Police are often ineffective in upholding law and order and are sometimes slow to assist religious minorities. This promotes an atmosphere of impunity for acts of violence against them.

In 2002, an AL-backed Convention on Crimes Against Humanity alleged “systematic persecution” of religious minorities and called for the perpetrators to be brought to trial under local and international law. In two cases, courts convicted the accused. In September 2003, a Speedy Trial Court in Barisal sentenced Ibrahim Khali and Dulal to life in prison (in practice 22½ years) for raping a Hindu woman at Annoda Proshad in Lord Hardinge Union of Lal Monhon subdistrict of Bhola district. The court also offered each convict a choice of a fine of approximately \$165 (Taka 10,000) or an additional 6 months in prison. Both convicts were serving their terms, and their appeals were pending in court. Also, in October 2003, a Speedy Trial Court sentenced six persons to life in prison and acquitted a seventh person accused of raping a Hindu woman after the 2001 parliament election in the Sadar sub-district of Bhola. The convicts appealed the verdict to the High Court; the appeal was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Human rights groups and press reports indicated that vigilantism against women accused of moral transgressions occurred in rural areas, often under a fatwa, and included punishments such as whipping. During 2004, 35 fatwa cases occurred in which 5 persons were lashed and others faced punishments ranging from physical assault to shunning of families by their communities. One human rights organization recorded 32 fatwa cases in 2002, in which 19 persons were lashed, and others

faced punishments ranging from physical assault to shunning of families by their communities.

There are approximately 100,000 Ahmadis concentrated in Dhaka and several other locales. In the latter part of 2003, they were the targets of attacks and harassment prompted by clerics and leaders of the Islami Okiyya Jote. Many mainstream Muslims view Ahmadis as heretics. In October 2003, 17 Ahmadi families in Kushtia were barricaded in their homes for several days. In November 2003, police stopped a mob of about 5,000 attempting to destroy an Ahmadi mosque in Tejgaon, Dhaka. In December 2003, anti-Ahmadi activists killed a prominent Ahmadi leader in Jessore; however, there were no results from the subsequent police investigations in any of these cases. On January 8, 2004, the Government announced a ban on all Ahmadi publications; the ban has not been promulgated officially, but in April and May 2004, police entered and seized documents from Ahmadi mosques.

Throughout the first three quarters of 2004, the police provided minimal protection to Ahmadiyya communities facing harassment.

In April 2004, allegedly 12 Ahmadi houses were destroyed; 15 Ahmadi men and women in Rangpur reportedly were held against their will and pressed to renounce their faith. They were released after hours of verbal harassment; no legal action was taken against their assailants.

At the end of May 2004, the Khatme Nabuwat Andolan, a group of anti-Ahmadi Islamic clerics, reportedly threatened to evict thousands of Ahmadis from their homes in Patuakhali, Rangpur, and Chittagong. The same group also threatened to attack Ahmadi mosques in those districts. Many Ahmadis appealed to the administration for protection and security.

In October 2004, police and paramilitary troops prevented supporters of two anti-Ahmadi groups from attacking the Ahmadi mosque in a town 10 miles southeast of Dhaka. On October 29, 2004, an anti-Ahmadi mob injured 11 Ahmadis in an attempt to seize a mosque 100 miles east of Dhaka.

On December 21, 2004, the Government printed a Gazette banning Ahmadi publications but did not release it. After local human rights activists and Ahmadi leaders filed a writ petition challenging the Gazette, the High Court stayed the ban.

On March 11, 2005, following a week of processions throughout Bangladesh demanding that the Government declare Ahmadis non-Muslims, a mob attempted to lay siege to a mosque in the town of Bogra, hoping to remove the "Ahmadi Mosque" sign. Police controlled the mob but removed the sign. After a few hours, police put the sign back up.

On April 18, 2005, members of the International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh (IKNMB), an anti-Ahmadi movement which has been lobbying the government to declare Ahmadis non-Muslims, attacked an Ahmadi community in the Shatkira district ransacking some homes and injuring over 50 persons after hanging a new sign on an Ahmadi mosque.

In April 2005, there was a spate of attacks on Ahmadis—none fatal—that indicated inadequate police protection. A pattern has developed where mobs approach an Ahmadi mosque with a sign declaring the place "a house of worship not a mosque" with the intention of replacing the current sign. Twice, the police aided the crowd by putting up the sign in what they claim is a preventive measure for controlling the mobs.

In general, citizens do not perceive Christians as Western society surrogates, and Christians are not targeted or harassed in response to citizens' widespread perception that the U.S.-led war on global terrorism is "anti-Muslim."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government routinely discusses religious freedom issues with officials at all levels of the Government as well as with political party leaders and representatives of religious and minority communities. During the previous reporting period, the U.S. Embassy encouraged Jamaat Islami to reiterate publicly its position that it supports tolerance and minority rights in the context of an attack on a religious minority member. Jamaat Islami demurred until April 2005, when Jamaat Islami released a public statement condemning attacks on religious minorities and the use of violence. During the previous reporting period, the Embassy also successfully encouraged the leader of a major political party to condemn attacks on Ahmadis. An article that the Ambassador wrote for local newspapers on Human Rights Day on December 10, 2003, stressed the importance of religious tolerance and other basic rights. Democracy and governance projects supported by the U.S. include tolerance and minority rights components.

Due to the increased attacks on Ahmadis, the U.S. Government made religious freedom a central point of discussion in meetings with the Prime Minister, the For-

eign Minister, the Law Minister, the Home Minister, and several other ministers beginning in December 2003 and continuing throughout this reporting period. The Embassy expressed its views on religious freedom to the media and public forums related to democracy and governance.

After the new attacks on Ahmadis in April 2005, the Ambassador visited the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Dhaka to show support for their security and religious freedom; Deputy Assistant Secretary did likewise in June. Assistant Secretary Rocca also visited Ahmadiyya headquarters in May 2004 to emphasize the importance the U.S. Government places on religious freedom.

Following demands for the ban of Ahmadi publications and that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims, the Government announced such a ban on January 8, 2004. However, several days later, after senior-level representations by the Embassy and a visiting Congressional delegation, the Prime Minister announced that the Government would not declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. In addition, after the Embassy and several human rights organizations expressed concerns, the Government in March deferred action on legislation proposed by a BNP parliamentarian that would have created a blasphemy law based on the Pakistani model.

Embassy and visiting U.S. Government officials regularly visited members of minority communities to hear their concerns and demonstrate support.

The Embassy assisted U.S. Christian-affiliated relief organizations in guiding paperwork for approval of schools and other projects through government channels. The Government has been receptive to discussion of such subjects and generally helpful in resolving problems. The Embassy has also acted as an advocate in the Home Ministry for these organizations in resolving problems with visas.

The Embassy encouraged the Government through the Ministry for Religious Affairs to develop and expand its training program for Islamic religious leaders. After an initial pilot program, the U.S. Government provided, among other topics, course work for religious leaders on human rights and gender equality.

BHUTAN

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limited this right in practice by barring non-Buddhist missionaries from entering the country, limiting construction of non-Buddhist religious buildings, and restricting the celebration of some non-Buddhist religious festivals and limiting others. Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion, although in the southern areas many citizens openly and mostly freely practice Hinduism.

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

Pressure for conformity with Mahayana Buddhist norms was reinforced through the requirement that citizens wear the traditional dress of the ethnic Ngalops, who are predominantly Buddhist, in all government buildings, monasteries, and schools. There were no reports of violence associated with pressure to conform to Mahayana norms.

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and Bhutan; however, there is cordial and ongoing bilateral interaction, and the U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government informally as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 18,146 square miles. Population figures vary greatly, but the Government estimated a population of 700,000. The Government held a nationwide census in May and stated that initial results would be made public at the end of 2005. Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of the population practice Drukpa Kagyupa or Nyingmapa Buddhism, both of which are disciplines of Mahayana Buddhism. The Drukpa discipline is practiced predominantly in the western and central parts of the country, although there are adherents in other regions.

Ethnic Ngalops, descendants of Tibetan immigrants, comprise the majority of the population in the western and central parts of the country. The Ngalops predominate in government and the civil service, and the monarchy has decreed their cultural norms and dress to be the standard for all citizens.

The Nyingmapa school of Mahayana Buddhism is practiced predominantly in the eastern region of the country, although there are also adherents in other areas. Most living in the east are ethnic Sarchops, descendants of those thought to be the

country's original inhabitants. Several Sarchops held high positions in the Government, the National Assembly, and the court system.

The Government supports both Kagyupa and Ningmapa monasteries. The royal family practices a combination of Ningmapa and Kagyupa Buddhism, and many Bhutanese believe in the concept of "Kanyin-Zungdrel," meaning "Kagyupa and Ningmapa as one."

Many citizens also respect the teachings of an animist and shamanistic faith called Bon, which revolves around the worship of nature, and predates Buddhism. Although Bon priests still can be found and Bon rituals sometimes are included in Buddhist festivals, very few citizens adhere to this faith.

Approximately one-quarter of the population are ethnic Nepalese who live mainly in the south and practice Hinduism. The Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Shakta, Ghanapathi, Puranic, and Vedic schools are represented among Hindus. Hindu temples exist in southern Bhutan, and Hindus were allowed to practice their religion in small- to medium-sized groups.

Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, are present throughout the country in very small numbers, comprising a fraction of 1 percent of the population. There was reportedly only one building used for Christian worship in the south, the only location where there was a sufficiently large concentration of Christians to sustain a church. Elsewhere, Christian families and individuals were free to practice their religion at home, although nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claim that the Government discouraged open worship and both large and small gatherings. There are no Christian missionaries operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limited this right in practice. NGOs report that the government discourages both large and small religious gatherings of non-Buddhists, does not allow construction of churches or non-Buddhist temples, and does not allow non-Buddhist missionaries to work in the country. Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion. Proselytism by other faiths is illegal. Although there is no legal prohibition against conversion, Bhutanese NGOs operating outside the country claimed the Government prohibited conversions by Buddhists to other faiths.

The country's Monastic Body of 3,500 monks was financed by an annual government grant and was the sole arbiter on religious matters. The body also played an advisory role to the National Assembly, the Royal Advisory Council, and the King, who consistently deferred to its pronouncements on almost all religious matters and some decisions affecting the state. Major Buddhist and Hindu holy days are also state holidays. The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, with a Hindu priest as a member, also advises on religious matters.

Questions on family law such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and child custody were addressed under the Marriage Act of 1980, amended in 1996. Traditionally, Buddhists and Hindus have resolved questions of family law according to the citizen's religion, but this is changing. A Christian group in the country reported that family law issues for all Bhutanese, regardless of religion, were resolved under Buddhist precepts. Bhutan's evolving legal system is based on customary law and Buddhist precepts.

The Government subsidized Buddhist monasteries and shrines and provided aid to approximately one-third of the Kingdom's 12,000 monks. The Government states that it provides this support because its land reform program carried out in 1956 stripped the monastic establishment of wide tracts of fertile land for redistribution among the landless. In exchange, the Royal Government committed to provide financial support for the monasteries. By statute, 10 seats in the 150-seat National Assembly and 2 seats on the 11-member Royal Advisory Council are reserved for Buddhist monks. There are no religious stipulations on the remaining seats.

No new buildings, including new places of worship, can be constructed without government licenses. Reports by ethnic Nepalese citizens suggested that this process favored Buddhist temples over Hindu ones. The Government provided financial assistance for the construction of Buddhist temples and shrines and state funding for monks and monasteries. NGOs alleged that the Government rarely granted permission to build Hindu temples; the last report of such construction was in the early 1990s, when the Government provided funds for the construction and renovation of Hindu temples and centers of Sanskrit and Hindu learning. The Government argued that it was a matter of supply and demand, with demand for Buddhist temples far exceeding that for Hindu temples. The Government stated that it supported numer-

ous Hindu temples in the south, where most Hindus reside, and provided some scholarships for Hindus to study Sanskrit in India.

The King also declared major Hindu festivals as national holidays, and the royal family participated in them. However, there were no Hindu temples in the capital city of Thimphu, despite the migration of many ethnic Nepalese to the city.

Followers of religions other than Buddhism and Hinduism generally were free to worship in private homes, but NGOs alleged that they could not erect religious buildings or congregate in public.

Christians stated that in prior years the Government excluded them from census registration, making it difficult for them to qualify for higher education or government jobs. There were no reports of the Government excluding Christians from the May 2005 census. One Christian group alleged that personal prejudices may have led government officials to discriminate, such as by denying promotions to the handful of Christians in government service. The group commented that while there are cases where they think higher authorities are directing the discrimination, they stated that the Buddhist clergy is not the driving force behind these actions. This group, and others, also reported that Christian religious meetings must be held discreetly, especially in rural areas, for fear of the authorities. They claimed that there were no Christian churches in the country and that the Government would not grant approval for any such building.

Some NGOs reported increased intimidation by the Government of persons who do not look ethnically Ngalop, most of whom are Buddhists. Such actions reportedly included stopping persons at designated checkpoints and asking for their identity documents. The Government claimed the identity checks were part of an effort to control illegal residents; United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) camps were reportedly based in southern areas of the country until the Government ousted those terrorists in 2003.

NGO representatives living outside of the country and dissidents reported that only Drukpa Kagyupa and Nyingmapa Buddhist religious teaching is permitted in schools and that Buddhist prayer is compulsory in all government-run schools. The Government contended that Buddhist teaching is permitted only in monastic schools and that religious teaching is forbidden in other schools. NGO interlocutors confirmed that although students take part in a prayer session each morning, it is non-denominational and not compulsory.

The Government requires all citizens, when in public places, to wear the traditional dress of the Ngalop majority; however, it enforced this law strictly only for visits to Buddhist religious buildings, monasteries, government offices, and schools and for attendance at official functions and public ceremonies. Some citizens commented that enforcement of this law was arbitrary and sporadic.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Dissidents claimed that the Government prohibits religious conversion from Buddhism to other religions. Foreign missionaries were not permitted to proselytize, but international Christian relief organizations and Jesuit priests were active in education and humanitarian activities. An NGO has reported that some Christians did not worship openly for fear of discrimination; however, this claim could not be corroborated.

Certain senior civil servants, regardless of religion, are required to take an oath of allegiance to the King, the country, and the people. The oath does not have religious content, but a Buddhist lama administers it. Dissidents alleged that applicants have been asked their religion before receiving government services.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities discriminated against ethnic Nepalese residents and citizens in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when many were forcibly expelled (although others may have left voluntarily). Although the causes of this official discrimination and the expulsions were cultural, economic, and political, to the degree that their Hinduism identified them as members of the ethnic Nepalese minority, religion might have been a secondary factor. The Government contended that many of those expelled in the early 1990s were illegal immigrants with no right to citizenship or residency and that other ethnic Nepalese “voluntarily emigrated” at that time. Some of those expelled are petitioning for the right to return, although none has yet returned. More than 100,000 ethnic Nepalese continued to live in refugee camps in eastern Nepal. (For a more detailed discussion, see the 2004 Country Report on Human Rights Practices.)

The Government resettled Bhutanese citizens from other parts of the country on land in the south vacated by the expelled ethnic Nepalese, a majority of whom were Hindu, in the early 1990s. Human rights groups maintained that this action preju-

diced any possibility for land restoration to returning refugees. The Government maintained that this was not its first resettlement program and that ethnic Nepalese citizens from the south sometimes were resettled in other parts of the country.

In April 2004, a religious freedom website alleged that following Easter Sunday services, police raided three Protestant house churches in the Sarpang district in the southern part of the country. There were no arrests; however, church members allegedly were warned to stop meeting and told that the Government viewed their meetings as “terrorist activities.” The Government denied these reports as totally false. No new information was available concerning this case.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

NGOs and well-informed sources stated that the Government in early 2005 began to issue national identity cards to ethnic Nepalese who have family members living in refugee camps in Nepal. This was a marked change in government policy and could point to a greater acceptance of these predominantly Hindu persons as bona fide Bhutanese citizens.

There have been some attempts to promote interfaith understanding. Monks from the country’s two schools of Buddhism, Kagyupa and Nyingmapa, undertook regular exchanges. The King’s example of making Hindu festivals official holidays and observing them also had a positive effect on citizens’ attitudes.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Governmental discrimination against ethnic Nepalese in the late 1980s and early 1990s arose in part from a desire to preserve the country’s Buddhist culture against the influence of a growing population of ethnic Nepalese with different cultural and religious traditions. It also was a response to increased political assertiveness of the ethnic Nepalese community.

During the reporting period, the Government and many Buddhists remained preoccupied with fears of potential Nepalese domination. Societal pressures toward non-Buddhists were reflected in official and unofficial efforts to impose the dress and cultural norms of the Buddhist majority on all citizens. While there were no reports of the repetition of the excesses of the late 1980s and early 1990s, societal and governmental pressure for conformity with Drukpa Kagyupa norms was prevalent.

Some of the country’s few Christians, who are mostly ethnic Nepalese living in the south, claimed that they were harassed and discriminated against by the Government, local authorities, and non-Christian citizens.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

There are no formal diplomatic relations between the United States and Bhutan. Informal contacts between the two governments took place frequently. During these exchanges, governmental discrimination against the ethnic Nepalese minority was discussed.

In October 2004, senior State Department officials and a U.S. Embassy officer from New Delhi discussed religious freedom in the context of the refugee issue and the draft Constitution in Thimphu. During the meeting, the officials expressed hope that the upcoming Constitution would include guarantees of religious freedom and protection for minority populations. The officials also commented that the Government needs to find a lasting solution for the refugees in Nepal, who are mostly Hindu, in order to demonstrate that the Government is committed to a policy of religious tolerance.

In March and April, a senior Embassy official and a high-level State Department official traveled to the country and discussed religious freedom, the draft Constitution, and the refugee issue with senior members of the Government. The U.S. Government has also worked to promote religious freedom and other democratic values

by sponsoring several citizens to travel to the United States under the International Visitors Program.

INDIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, the Government sometimes in the recent past did not act swiftly enough to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by some leaders of state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This resulted in part from legal constraints on central government action inherent in the country's federal structure, and from shortcomings in the law enforcement and justice systems, although courts regularly uphold the constitutional provision of religious freedom. Despite the Government's efforts to foster communal harmony, some extremists continued to view ineffective investigation and prosecution of attacks on religious minorities as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity, although numerous cases are currently in the courts.

The status of religious freedom improved in a number of ways during the period covered by this report, yet problems remained in some areas. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) espoused an inclusive and secular platform, pledging to respect the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance, and respect the rights of religious minorities. The UPA coalition government also took steps to address the failures of the government of Gujarat to halt expeditiously Hindu-Muslim riots there in 2002. Minority rights activists reported that instances of communal violence decreased during the reporting period as a result. The Government repealed the controversial Prevention of Terrorist Act (POTA), often criticized by Muslim groups as a tool used to target them, and replaced it with a law considered by numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to be fairer to minorities. The Government also withdrew controversial school textbooks that had been condemned for espousing a Hindu nationalist agenda and replaced them with more moderate versions, although problems linger in some states controlled by the opposition. The National Human Rights Commission also intervened in the ongoing legal battles surrounding the 2002 Gujarat riots, resulting in the reopening of 2000 cases.

Tensions between religious groups were a problem in some places and attacks on religious minorities occurred in several states. However, improvements were observed during the period covered by this report, and the vast majority of Indians of every religious creed lived in peaceful coexistence. Despite the UPA government's rejection of "Hindutva," the ideology that espouses politicized inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms above other religious norms, the ideology continued to influence governmental policies and societal attitudes in some regions at the state and local levels, especially in areas governed by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). However, such political views are subjected to court review to test whether or not their implementation is in harmony with India's secular constitution. The BJP/NDA rejects accusations that it is trying to enforce Hindu norms for all; rather, it asserts that it seeks only to remove from law and regulations what it claims are pervasive discriminatory treatments inherited from past foreign rulers that harm or disadvantage Hindus.

No new anti-conversion legislation was introduced in the states, and Tamil Nadu repealed its anti-conversion law. The Gujarat police conducted no illegal surveys of Christians during the period covered by this report. While the Government took some steps to decrease religious tensions, violence directed against minorities by both state and nonstate actors persisted. Religious extremists continued to distribute tridents (trishuls), three-pronged Hindu symbols which were sometimes used as weapons or to intimidate, in Rajasthan and Orissa.

With a Muslim President, Sikh Prime Minister—the first time a member of a religious minority ever held the post—and a Christian head of the governing parliamentary party, the UPA government demonstrated its commitment to a policy of religious inclusion at its highest levels and throughout this generally tolerant and highly diverse society.

Although the Central Government took steps to address the issue, such as involvement by the Supreme Court and National Human Rights Commission, the prospects of justice for victims of 2002 Gujarat violence remained uncertain during the reporting period. In an April 2004 decision, the Indian Supreme Court ordered that two emblematic cases, the Best Bakery case and the Bilkis Bano mass rape case, must be retried in Mumbai courts outside the purview of the government of Gujarat. However, in the Best Bakery Case, the principal witness, Zaheera Shaikh, twice changed her testimony; first claiming she was threatened by Hindu national-

ists allied with the defense and then by a human rights activist allied with the prosecution. The Supreme Court was investigating these allegations. The Bilkis Bano case remains under trial.

In August 2004, the Supreme Court asked the Government of Gujarat to appoint a high-level police committee to examine why the state government had closed some 2000 cases relating to the Gujarat violence without charging anyone. By the end of the reporting period, the Gujarat police had not responded. The Nanavati-Shah judicial commission, established by the Government of Gujarat, investigated the February 2002 Godhra train fire and the subsequent violence that left an estimated 2,000 dead and 100,000 displaced (the majority of them Muslims), but indicated that its report would not be ready before December 2005. In July 2004, the Government established a Commission headed by Justice Banerjee to study the train fire. This commission's interim report, issued in January, indicated that the fire might have been an accident rather than a criminal conspiracy, as alleged by the Government of Gujarat. The Banerjee commission report, initially due in April, has yet to be released.

Allegations that police failed to take adequate action to save victims during the 2002 Gujarat violence have still not been satisfactorily investigated. It was alleged widely that the police and state government did little to stop the violence promptly and at times encouraged or assisted Hindus committing acts of violence. There were reports of intimidation and harassment of witnesses during the reporting period.

Conversion continued to be a highly contentious issue. Hindu nationalist organizations and others frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured converts, particularly from the lower castes, with offers of free education and healthcare and equated such actions with forced conversions. Christians denied this charge, responding that persons convert on their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to "reconvert" Christians to Hinduism were themselves coercive. Several state governments have responded to the allegations by Hindu groups by enacting laws to strengthen proscriptions against coerced conversion. Forced religious conversion is illegal, but some NGOs claim some state governments have used this type of legislation to restrict voluntary conversions as well.

The United States supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious and communal tolerance and freedom. Members of the embassy community celebrated Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals throughout the year with members of the various religious communities. During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Embassy officers hosted several Iftars to promote better relations with the minority Muslim community and met with leaders of several of India's religious groups throughout the year. In addition, the Department of State's Bureau of South Asian Affairs hosted an Iftar in Washington, bringing together diplomats from the Bangladesh, Pakistan and Indian Embassies. The Embassy also expanded the Urdu and Hindi editions of SPAN magazine, which explores issues such as globalization, conflict resolution, human rights, academic freedom and inclusiveness toward women and minorities. Mission officers also investigated the plight of internally displaced Kashmiri Hindus, known as Pandits, who fled their home areas in the valley of Kashmir starting in 1989 due to attacks on them by terrorists seeking to drive out non-Muslims.

The Department of State authorized a consular officer to find that a senior state-level official was ineligible for a visa under section 212 (a)(2)(G) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, which makes ineligible any foreign government official who "was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom." In the particular case concerned, the finding led to revocation of the official's business/visitor visa.

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy and its consulates promoted religious freedom in their discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. During meetings with key leaders of all significant religious communities, U.S. officials discussed reports of ongoing harassment of minority groups, converts, and missionaries. U.S. officials continued to meet with officials and private citizens concerning the Gujarat violence and to engage state officials on the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion laws.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 1.3 million square miles and a population of approximately 1.02 billion. According to the 2001 government census, Hindus constituted 80.5 percent of the population, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.8 percent, and others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, 1.1 percent. Hinduism has many branches, with

the most widely followed being Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Slightly more than 90 percent of Muslims are Sunni; the rest are Shi'a. Buddhists include followers of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools, and there are both Catholic and Protestant Christians. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which in government statistics generally are included among Hindus, often practice traditional indigenous religions (animism). Hindus and Muslims are spread throughout the country, although large Muslim populations are found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala, and Muslims are a majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christian concentrations are found in the northeast, as well as in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Goa. Three small northeastern states (Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya) have large Christian majorities. Sikhs are a majority in the state of Punjab.

Over the years, many lower caste Hindus, dalits (formerly called "untouchables"), and non-Hindu tribal groups have converted to other faiths to escape widespread discrimination and achieve higher social status. However, lower caste and dalit Hindu converts continue to be viewed by both their new coreligionists and by Hindus, through the prism of caste. Converts are regarded widely as retaining the caste of their ancestors, and caste identity, whether or not acknowledged by a person's own religion, has an effect on marriage prospects, social status, and economic opportunity. Although less known, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs also have societal stratification structures comparable to those of Hinduism, resulting in discrimination between co-religionists based on caste.

Immigrants, primarily from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, practice various religions and tend to concentrate in the border regions near these countries.

According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, the country contains approximately 100 registered foreign Christian missionaries, most of them over the age of 70, who represent a variety of Christian denominations. Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu missionaries also operate. Foreign Rabbis also regularly visit and participate in religious ceremonies for the very small Jewish population, estimated to be fewer than 5,000 individuals.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Central Government generally respected this right in practice; however, some state and local governments only partially respected this freedom.

The country is a secular state with no official religion. The country's political system is federal, according state governments exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and the maintenance of order, which has limited the Central Government's capacity to deal directly with abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), cannot investigate a crime committed in a state without the state government's permission. However, the Central Government's law enforcement authorities, in some instances, have intervened to maintain order when state governments were reluctant or unwilling to do so.

The appointed members of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) are tasked respectively with protecting minority and human rights. These governmental bodies investigate allegations of discrimination and bias and make recommendations for redress to the relevant local or central government authorities. Although they do not have the force of law, NHRC recommendations generally are followed.

These agencies intervened in several cases relating to the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat that occurred following the burning in Godhra of the S-6 coach of the Sabarmati Express train, in which 59 men, women and children died. In June 2002, an NHRC investigation concluded that the attacks "were a comprehensive failure on the part of the state government to control the persistent violation of rights of life, liberty, equality, and dignity of the people of the state." The Indian Supreme Court heard petitions concerning the Gujarat violence by various NGOs, victims and the NHRC, and in December 2003, directed the CBI to reinvestigate the Bilkis Bano Case.

In January 2004, the CBI began the reinvestigation of the rape of Bilkis Bano during the 2002 riots, and the murder of her relatives. In April 2004, the CBI filed fresh charges against Gujarat police officers and two government doctors in the case. In April 2004, the Indian Supreme Court stayed the trial of 10 other major cases until the retrials of the Best Bakery and Bilkis Bano cases were completed. In the Best Bakery case, 21 persons are being tried for the killing of 14 persons during the riots.

In May 2004, the Indian Supreme Court directed the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to assign officers to guard witnesses in four major post-riot cases in Gujarat. In August, the Indian Supreme Court asked the Gujarat police to review the “summary closing” of approximately 2100 cases relating to the 2002 violence. By the end of the reporting period, the Gujarat police had not completed this review. The Best Bakery and Bilkis Bano retrials, which began in two Mumbai courts in September, continued to be heard.

There are no registration requirements for religious groups; however, all foreigners, including missionaries, are required to register with the local police station before working in the country.

A number of federal and state laws regulate religious life in India. These include The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, which restricts funding from abroad, several state anti-conversion laws, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967, the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988, India’s Foreigners Act of 1946, and the Indian Divorce Act of 1869.

To ensure communal harmony, the Government is empowered to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in terrorism or sedition, or have violated the FCRA. Christian organizations have complained that this prohibition prevents them from properly financing humanitarian and educational activities. Some Muslim and Hindu groups also had difficulty funding their activities due to the act.

Laws against “forcible” conversion have been in effect in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa since the 1960s, and also exist in Arunachal Pradesh. Chhattisgarh, which has been a separate state only since 2000, retained the anti-conversion law dating from when it was still part of Madhya Pradesh. In March 2003, Gujarat passed an anti-conversion law, which applies criminal penalties to those “forcing” or “alluring” individuals to convert. By the end of the reporting period, the Gujarat law had not yet come into force, because the rules and regulations needed to implement it had not been finalized.

During the period covered by this report, no new anti-conversion laws were passed and Tamil Nadu repealed its statutes which had been essentially “nonfunctional.” In March, the Maharashtra Chief Minister announced in the state parliament that the Government of Maharashtra had no intention of passing a special anti-conversion law. A proposal to introduce a national anti-conversion law lapsed in 2002, and the new UPA Government has not revived it.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act lists offenses against disadvantaged persons and provides for stiff penalties for offenders; however, this act had only a modest effect in curbing abuse due to victims’ fears of retaliation if they accused high-caste members. Intercaste violence was especially pronounced in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, and has claimed hundreds of lives. Human rights NGOs alleged that caste violence was on the increase. Caste violence crosses religious boundaries and is in many cases a socio-economic rather than political phenomenon. This violence is often a type of class struggle and is not always an infringement on religious freedom.

In November 2004, the Government amended the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967 to correct excesses contained in the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). The new statute empowers the Government to ban any religious organization that provokes intercommunity friction, has been involved in terrorism or sedition, or violated the 1976 FCRA. The UAPA has been used intermittently, as in 2000, when the Government declared Deendar Anjuman, (a militant Islamic organization), illegal for its alleged involvement in bombings in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra. The ban will last until 2007, unless extended. In 2001, the Government also banned the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) under UAPA.

The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988 makes it an offense to use any religious site for political purposes or to harbor persons accused or convicted of crimes. While designed to deal specifically with Sikh places of worship in Punjab, the law applies to all religious sites.

There is no national law barring a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs; however, speaking publicly against other beliefs is deemed dangerous to public order and is prohibited by the country’s Foreigners Act. This act strictly prohibits visitors on tourist visas from religious preaching without permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. A number of cable television networks dedicated to religious programming operate in the country and propagate their beliefs.

In January, the Government permitted the U.S.-based evangelical leader Benny Hinn to hold a rally in Bangalore attended by thousands. The Government stipu-

lated that the event must not disturb the peace and that no one should perform “divine healing.” One online news service reported that Hinn carried out “divine healing,” but the Government took no action. A few Hindu groups protested the event, resulting in minor damage to property and vehicles in the area.

Another U.S.-based Christian evangelist, Pat Robertson, spoke at a prayer meeting in Delhi on May 13 attended by dignitaries such as Congress leader Subodh Kant Sahay. The event attracted approximately 3,000 persons and, with a moderate police presence, concluded peacefully. There was no agitation during the meeting. Visiting Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish leaders also regularly address the faithful without incident.

Foreign missionaries and religious organizations must comply with the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) of 1976, which restricts funding from abroad. In April, the Catholic Secular Forum expressed concern to the Government over the establishment of a group in the Maharashtra Home Ministry to monitor funds being used by Christian missionaries and NGOs.

Some laws, such as the repealed Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), while not specifically written to target minorities, affected particular ethnic or religious groups. A study carried out by the NGO “People’s Tribunal” in 10 states in July 2004 found that 99.9 percent of those arrested under POTA were Muslims. A 2003 report also showed that 124 of 126 persons arrested for the Godhra train arson, predominantly Muslims, were charged under POTA, while no Hindus arrested in connection with the riots in Gujarat were similarly charged. However, on June 22, the Central POTA Review Committee stated that there was not enough evidence to support the use of POTA against those accused in the Godhra train massacre case and recommended that the charges be dropped. The POTA court has yet to follow through on the recommendation.

Legally mandated benefits are assigned to certain groups, including some minority religious groups. For example, minority religious institutions can reserve seats for members of their faith in their educational institutions, and Hindu institutions can do so for scheduled members of their faith. Minority-run institutions also are entitled to government funding, albeit with restrictions, but government benefits accorded to dalits are revoked if they convert from Hinduism to Christianity. Those who convert to Buddhism, Islam, or Sikhism, do not lose benefits.

There are many religions and a large variety of denominations, groups, and sub-groups in the country, but Hinduism has by far the most followers. Although the Constitution specifies that the Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh faiths are different from the Hindu religion, interpretations by Hindu nationalist groups have defined them as Hindu sects. Such interpretations have been contentious, particularly for the Sikh community, many of whose leaders views Sikhism as a unique religion, distinct from Hinduism. Sikhs have sought a separately codified body of law to recognize this distinction legally and preclude ambiguity.

During the year, the NCM recommended that Buddhists should manage the shrine of Bodh Gaya in Bihar. The current state law, in place since 1949, was drafted to prevent Buddhist control by ensuring that Buddhists would always be a minority on the commission managing the temple. The Commission also called for the nomination of members of the Parsi community to the State Assemblies of Gujarat and Maharashtra, whose sizable Parsi populations are currently underrepresented in political life.

In September 2004, the NCM created advisory commissions to determine why several North Indian states had not heeded its calls to convene state-level commissions and advisory boards to ensure minority group representation in local government.

During the reporting period, the NCM also made a number of recommendations to curb communal violence. It specified that senior police officers who do not take action to end communal riots within 24 hours should be suspended, and the army automatically called in to put an end to religious violence. The NCM also called for special provisions to punish those guilty of inciting communal violence, and requiring judges to submit a report within 6 months after the outbreak of communal violence. These recommendations have not yet been implemented.

The NCM stated that although the percentage of Christians in India had remained at 2.3 percent from 1991 to 2001, scientific analysis of 2001 Census data documented “abnormally high growth of the Christian population in the Northeast, especially in those areas bordering Bangladesh.” On February 14, the NCM stated that this “abnormally high” growth of the Christian population in the northeast could be due to illegal Bangladeshi migrants reporting themselves as Christians. The NCM theorized that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh could have claimed to be Christians because they may have believed that admitting to be Muslim would make them more likely to be deported.

Nagaland, Mizoram, and Tripura have the highest percentage of Christians, and the growth rate of the community was high. The NCM stated that between 1991 and 2001 the Hindu population in Tripura grew by 15 percent and the Christian population grew by 121 percent. Since there was no evidence of large-scale migration of Christians from Bangladesh, where Christians are very small in number, conversion may be the dominant factor contributing to this trend.

Unhappy with the NCM statements, the Christian community in the Northeast on March 1 urged the Government to reconstitute the NCM, as it had lost its credibility in their eyes as the guardian of minority community interests. A group of eight Northeast Christian associations maintained that the NCM comments regarding the alleged high increase in the Christian population in the region were "highly motivated," and demanded an apology.

Most Bangladeshi migrants in Assam are Muslim, and the BJP and other Hindu groups have called for their deportation, while extending a welcome to Bangladeshi Hindus, whom they allege are victims of Muslim religious persecution there.

There are different personal status laws for different minority religious communities, and the legal system accommodates religion-specific laws in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. Hindus do not benefit from such an arrangement. Muslim personal status law governs many noncriminal matters involving Muslims, including family law and inheritance. The BJP's political platform advocates that the country drop religion-specific legal codes and replace them with a uniform civil code that would treat all Indian citizens alike. Minority groups oppose such a move. The BJP views the lack of a uniform civil code as discriminatory in that it grants Muslims a status and prerogative others cannot enjoy. Many Muslims oppose the uniform code because they prefer religious-based family law. The Congress and left-wing parties have consistently supported Muslim civil codes so as to not alienate their Muslim supporters.

During the reporting period, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) launched an awareness campaign regarding the "triple talaq" issue (the ability of a husband to divorce his wife by repeating, "I divorce thee" three times). The campaign stressed that a husband cannot on his own end a marriage and that community elders should solve family disputes by facilitating decisions binding on both parties. On May 2, the AIMPLB adopted new talaq guidelines, stating that men should use a reversible single talaq requiring a 3-month waiting period known as the *iddat*. The guidelines also call for the husband to pay compensation to the wife's family in case of divorce, equality in property rights, protection against physical and emotional abuse, and assurances that remarried women will be able to see their families and that talaq will only be used as a last resort. The National Commission on Women (NCW) also highlighted the problem, asserting that the practice of triple talaq has been widely misused and contrasts with the progressive laws on divorce and marriage found in some other Muslim countries.

Under the Indian Divorce Act of 1869, a Christian woman could demand divorce only in the case of spousal abuse and certain categories of adultery; for a Christian man, a wife's adultery alone was sufficient. However, in 2001 this law was amended by Parliament to allow Christian women to file for divorce for the same reasons allowed to men. The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 places limits on inheritance, alimony payments and property ownership on persons from interfaith marriages that are not applied to others. Under the act, no Christian marriage in which one party is a non-Christian may be celebrated in a church, and clergymen who contravene its provisions could face up to 10 years' imprisonment. However, the Indian Divorce Act does not bar interfaith marriages in other places of worship.

In September 2004, the Andhra Pradesh state government, acting on a court order, included Muslims in the backward class list, entitling them to job reservations, and in June extended a 5 percent reservation to Muslims in education and government jobs. To ensure the positions go to those in need, the ordinance excludes Muslims who have already benefited from reservations or who are successful in their own right. The new reservations increase the number of reserved jobs and positions in educational institutions in Andhra Pradesh to 51 percent. In May, the UPA Government approved a reservation system allotting 50 percent of seats in 36 courses at Aligarh Muslim University to Muslims. Official sources stated that the new quota was introduced to promote the educational and cultural advancement of Muslims.

The Government permits private religious schools, but does not permit religious instruction in government schools. Since most students in Christian schools are Hindu, the schools have voluntarily long restricted religious instruction on Christianity only to Christian students. The Supreme Court ruled that the Government can prescribe merit-based admission for religious colleges that receive public fund-

ing, while those that do not may use their own criteria, including determining admissions based upon religious affiliation.

Many Hindu sects have established their own schools, although they do not receive aid from the state. Most Muslim madrassahs do not accept offered government aid, as many Muslims believe that it would subject their schools to stringent security clearance requirements. Muslims objected to attempts by BJP governments in Rajasthan and other states to limit their freedom and ability to propagate their religious beliefs.

Some moderate Hindus and Muslims reported in April that the right-wing Hindu Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) supported the website "Hindukids Universe" (www.hindukids.org), which provided false historical information to children. They argued that the information provided was incorrect and purposefully diminished the role of minorities.

The previous NDA government, whose term ended in May 2004, prompted criticism when it attempted to "saffronize" public education (i.e., make lessons consonant with the Hindu world view) by raising the profile of Hindu cultural norms, views and historical personalities in school textbooks and portraying other religions in a negative light. The books are published by the Government's National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), and are uniformly used in government and private schools and printed in various languages.

After the 2004 defeat of the NDA, the new UPA government pledged to "de-saffronize" textbooks and curricula nationwide and to restore the secular character of education. In March, the Government released new NCERT textbooks, based on the texts used prior to the controversial 2002 updates. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, which oversaw this project, stated that it had made only minor modifications to the books that predated the "saffronized" era.

In Delhi, the Directorate of Education, in collaboration with the State Council of Educational Research and Training, prepared 47 new textbooks, and other state governments are expected to do likewise. In June 2004, a panel constituted by NCERT reviewed the new textbooks and determined that they had poor content, shoddy presentation, and significant amounts of irrelevant information. The panel recommended to the Human Resource Development (HRD) minister that the new books not be used until the defects could be resolved. Therefore, Delhi students are now also using texts from the pre-"saffronized" period.

Press reports indicated that the rush to "de-saffronize" school texts resulted in Urdu versions not being ready for the academic year, which began in April. The reports asserted that this failure hurt Urdu-speaking students by depriving them of needed textbooks. The NCERT denied the claims.

In July, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) released a report on books used in schools that do not follow the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) syllabus and have not been approved by the NCERT. The report stated that some textbooks used in private schools affiliated with religious bodies propagated a narrow, often communal view of the world. Books used in madrassahs referred to pre-Aryan cultures negatively and described Aryans as "great and gentle," according to the CABE report. The report also stated that texts used in Hindu and Muslim schools affirmed they were "uncomfortable" with the Buddhist principle of non-violence, which impedes the prosecution of wrongdoers. According to the report, books used in madrassahs, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, accentuate communal bias and glorify everything Islamic while emphasizing blind faith at the expense of critical and scientific thinking.

On December 16, 2004, Parliament passed a bill creating the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions, which will be empowered to resolve disputes involving allegations of discrimination against minority schools.

The Government maintains a list of banned books that may not be imported or sold in the country, including Salman Rushdie's "Satanic Verses," which contain material that governmental censors deem inflammatory and could provoke communal or religious tensions. In March 2004, the Maharashtra state government banned the book "Shivaji: The Hindu King in Islamic India," for allegedly making slanderous remarks against 17th century Indian warrior Shivaji and his mother. The Maharashtra state government also filed criminal charges against the book's author, American professor James Laine. In March, Shivaji's descendent Udayan Raje Bhosale filed a defamation suit against James Laine in the Satara district court in Maharashtra for his use of the epithet "Oedipal King" in another book on Shivaji. The district court issued notices to the author and publisher. In April, the Mumbai High Court stayed the proceedings of this second case until the Supreme Court deals with the 2004 matter.

In 2003, the West Bengal government banned Taslima Nasreen's book "Split in Two," claiming that it could incite "enmity and communal disturbance" as pro-

scribed under section 153A of the Indian Penal Code. At the end of the reporting period, all of these books continued to be banned.

On October 7, 2004 the Central Censor Board allowed the release of the film "Final Solution" that documented the Gujarat religious violence. The board had initially banned the film on the grounds that it would inflame communal tensions. Also, in June 2004, following protracted appeals to the Central Censor Board, the film "Aakrosh," which was banned for its treatment of the Gujarat riots of 2002, received the censor certificate allowing public screenings. The Board continued to refuse a censor certificate to the film "Chand Buz Gaya," featuring a character resembling controversial Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The story involves a Muslim girl and Hindu boy in love with each other who, mirroring reality, are separated by Hindu-Muslim riots that occur after a train arson incident.

In February, some Christians called for the film "Sins," to be banned for its portrayal of illicit sexual behavior by a Catholic priest. Efforts by the NCM Chairman to delay the film's release failed.

The major holy days of India's major religious groups are considered national holidays, including Good Friday and Christmas (Christian), the two Eids (Muslim), Lord Buddha's birthday (Buddhist), Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh), Dussehra, Diwali and Holi (Hindu), and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain). In 2003, the BJP government in Goa proposed removing Good Friday from the list of official holidays, but it withdrew the measure after widespread protests by Christians.

In April 2004, the Government of Gujarat transferred four religious holidays of the Hindu, Jain, Christian, and Muslim communities from the "official holidays list" to the "restricted holidays" list. Under this provision, Government offices remain open on those days, but employees can opt to take leave. Christian organizations protested the decision. In 2005, Good Friday coincided with a Hindu religious festival, and the Government of Gujarat did not include Good Friday on its list of official 2005 holidays. The Supreme Court of India ignored a petition from Christian organizations to overturn the decision to schedule a medical school entrance test on Easter Sunday, 2004.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act empowers the Government to ban a religious organization if it has provoked intercommunity friction, has been involved in terrorism or sedition, or has violated the 1976 FCRA, which restricts funding from abroad. Human Rights activists have criticized the Government for, they allege, selectively applying the FCRA against religious minorities.

In 2001, the Government officially banned the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967 for "fomenting communal tension" and actions "prejudicial to India's security." The Government alleged that SIMI had links with terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Hizbul Mujahideen. The Unlawful Activities Tribunal upheld the ban against SIMI and in 2003 police in three states arrested eight members, including former president of the SIMI Bhopal district unit, Khalid Naeem. He was later released on bail without charge; at the end of the period of this report, no further legal action had been taken. SIMI was reportedly still active in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, in spite of the government crackdown, and the Home Ministry reported that SIMI continues to act against national security interests.

In 2001 the Government banned the Muslim group Deendar Anjuman for "fomenting communal tension" and actions "prejudicial to India's security." In 2003 the Government extended the ban on Deendar Anjuman for another 2 years under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. During the reporting period, the government extended the ban until 2007.

Since 2000, Uttar Pradesh's "Religious Buildings and Places Bill" has required a permit endorsed by the state government before construction of any religious building. The bill's supporters stated that its aim was to curb the use of Muslim institutions by Islamist groups, but the measure remained controversial among religious groups in the north.

Legislation in West Bengal requires permission from the district magistrate before construction of a place of worship. Anyone intending to convert a personal place of worship into a public one is also required to obtain the district magistrate's permission. In 2003 the VHP, which propagates a return to Hindu values and cultural norms, announced it would launch a nationwide campaign to "reclaim" 30,000 Hindu temples that it contends had been converted into mosques. The VHP's published list includes the Gyan Vapi mosque in Varanasi, the Idgah mosque in Mathura, and the site of the former Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.

In 2003, the Special CBI court dismissed charges against then Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani, but not against seven other defendants accused of involvement in

the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992; opposition parties charged that the dismissal was a political move. The proposal to build a Hindu temple on the site remained a polarizing issue, but did not result in any serious conflicts during the reporting year.

The distribution of “trishuls” or tridents, three-pronged Hindu symbols sometimes used as weapons or to intimidate, popularized by the VHP in the late 1990s, subsided. In 2003 the Congress-led government in Rajasthan banned trishul distribution, while allowing their use in religious places and functions. In April 2003, VHP General Secretary Togadia was arrested after he defied the ban. He was released on bail a week later, and no charges have been filed. However, in August 2004, after the BJP won the state elections, the VHP and allied groups such as the Bajrang Dal handed out trishuls to nine of their workers in Udaipur. In May, the VHP and Bajrang Dal handed out approximately 500 trishuls at a ceremony in Nimapara, Orissa. Opposition parties denounced the move and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik stated that the Government would take all necessary steps to maintain peace and harmony in the state.

On May 5, parliament amended the Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 144 to allow district magistrates to ban any procession, “mass drill” or other gathering involving weapons, to include trishuls. The legislation also allows the government to ban training exercises using weapons. Home Ministry officials stated that the amendment was aimed at strengthening legal provisions meant to prevent “communal forces” from upsetting peace and harmony.

The BJP, which led two national coalition governments from 1998 until May 2004, is one of a number of offshoots of the RSS. Most BJP leaders, including former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, also are RSS members. Some Members of the BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) have been implicated in incidents of violence and discrimination against Christians and Muslims.

The BJP and RSS claim to respect and tolerate other religions; however, the RSS in particular opposes conversions from Hinduism and believes that all citizens regardless of their religious affiliation should adhere to Hindu cultural values. The BJP officially states that the caste system should be eradicated, but many of its members strongly adhere to it. The BJP political platform calls for the construction of a Hindu temple on the site of a mosque in Ayodhya destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992; for the repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution, which grants special rights to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the country’s only Muslim majority state; and for the enactment of a Uniform Civil Code that would apply to members of all religions.

Anti-conversion laws have been in effect in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa since the 1960s, and laws against forcible conversions exist also in Arunachal Pradesh. Chhattisgarh retained the anti-conversion law instituted when it was still part of Madhya Pradesh. In 2002–03, the states of Tamil Nadu and Gujarat passed “anti-conversion” laws. Both laws prescribe criminal prosecution for those persons “forcing” or “alluring” individuals to convert. However, the Gujarat state government has not promulgated the rules and regulations necessary for its implementation, and the law had not yet been applied. The Tamil Nadu anti-conversion law, under which no arrests had ever been made, was repealed in 2004. In March, the Maharashtra Chief Minister announced that his government had no intention of passing a special anti-conversion law. During the period covered by this report, no new anti-conversion laws were passed. A proposal to introduce a national anti-conversion law lapsed in 2002, and the new UPA Government has not revived it.

Indian law does not specify what constitutes “forced conversions” or “allurement.” Human rights groups, Christian religious leaders, Islamic groups, and dalits have expressed concern that until this is corrected, authorities will be able to use the law to shut down educational, medical, and other social services provided by Christian groups to non-Christians. However, the Central Government can intervene to prevent states from taking action if it determines that such moves pose a threat to national integrity and communal harmony, or violate the spirit of the Constitution. Hindu groups allege that non-Hindu groups use cash inducements and more sinister methods to encourage conversions.

Dalit and tribal converts from Hinduism often lose benefits conferred by the Government’s affirmative action programs because these, according to the Constitution, are reserved only for those having scheduled Hindu caste or scheduled tribe status. Reportedly, 24 percent of government jobs are reserved for members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, with each state choosing its own percentage of reserved jobs.

In March, the RSS stated that it opposes quotas for members of scheduled castes who convert to Christianity. Calling the converts “Crypto-Christians,” the RSS ar-

gued that members of scheduled castes who convert to Christianity should not be eligible, since there is no concept of “untouchability” in Christianity, and it would deprive Hindus of opportunities reserved through quotas in state jobs. Supporters of the measure argued that since dalit converts still face the same, if not more, discrimination despite their conversion, the quotas are needed to help pull them out of poverty. The RSS also claimed that Muslims and Christians born in the country should not call themselves minorities, as their forefathers were Hindu. RSS General Secretary Mohan Rao Bhagawat stated that during the colonial period, the British introduced the “minority-majority” concept as part of a plan to divide the country and that the only genuine minorities are Jews and Parsees.

In April, in an attempt to address criticism from Christian groups, the Supreme Court in April ordered the Government to investigate the plight of Christian converts from scheduled castes and tribes, but it has not yet released a report. In a legal quirk, members of Hindu scheduled castes and tribes who convert to Islam do not lose their access to reservations, but those who convert to Christianity do. A Hindu group, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP or World Hindu Council) has objected to the demands by Christian converts to take advantage of reservations, and has in Orissa threatened to launch a campaign calling for the dismissal of Christian government officers who granted such rights to tribal Christians.

The Congress Party of Assam currently sets aside 34 State Assembly tickets for Muslim candidates. On January 20, the Assam Congress Minority Cell demanded that the party allot at least three tickets to Christian candidates. Christians comprised four percent of Assam’s population and had no reservations.

In 2003, the Gujarat legislature passed the Freedom of Religion Act, which requires that those conducting a conversion ceremony seek the permission of the District Collector, and that the police investigate allegations of forced or induced conversions. The act also prescribes greater punishments if the person being improperly converted is a woman, from a scheduled caste, or a “tribal.”

In 2003, a group of dalits asked the Vadodara (Gujarat) Collector for permission to convert to Buddhism under the act; the collector had not given permission by the end of the period covered by this report. In 2003, one Christian and one Buddhist organization filed a case in Ahmedabad High Court against the act; the court dismissed the petition as premature, since the act’s rules and regulations had not yet been published. State officials made no attempts to implement it in the absence of formal regulations.

In Chhattisgarh, an anti-conversion law has been in force since the 1970s when the current state was part of Madhya Pradesh. Under current provisions, a conversion offense is punishable with imprisonment for a maximum of 2 years, and a maximum fine of \$220 (Rs 10,000). On July 18, 2003, in the first conviction under the law, Sister Brishi Ekka was sentenced to 6 months in jail for not reporting the 1996 conversion of 95 families to Christianity. Sister Ekka appealed the decision in the Chhattisgarh High Court, and was later released on bail. At the end of the period covered by this report, the high court had still not heard the case, and Sister Ekka remained free on bail.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 contains a provision requiring a monthly report from the state government specifying the number of conversions. Before a conversion takes place, the district magistrate must be informed and a local police officer conducts an inquiry. The report is then forwarded to the state authorities. The police officer can recommend in favor of or against the intended conversion, and often is the sole arbitrator. There were no reports that a district magistrate denied permission for any conversions during the period covered by this report. In 2000, the Orissa government notified churches that conversions could not occur without the permission of the local police and district magistrate. Although the rule does not appear to have been enforced during the period covered by this report, it has not been withdrawn.

In the south, religious groups allege that under the BJP government some local officials enforced laws selectively to the detriment of religious minorities. The groups cite numerous examples of discrimination, such as biased interpretations of postal regulations, including removal of postal subsidies, refusals to allocate land for the building of churches, and heightened scrutiny of NGOs to ensure that foreign contributions are made according to the law.

In 2003, the Tamil Nadu Government ordered the leading Christian missionary hospital in South Asia, the Christian Medical College (CMC) of Vellore, to accept government-sponsored candidates into 40 percent of its school seats, in violation of the constitutional Special Minority Status guarantees given to unaided institutions. The Supreme Court directed the Government of Tamil Nadu in 2003, to form a committee to look into the question of admissions procedures followed by privately funded minority education institutions. In the interim, the Supreme Court permitted the

hospital to follow its prior admissions policy. The Tamil Nadu government constituted a committee in March 2004 to examine the issue, but the Supreme Court has yet to issue a verdict.

The Tamil Nadu government also has worked actively to strengthen Hindu institutions. For example, in 2002, the Government initiated renovation of 200 Hindu temples throughout the state and sponsored spiritual classes in 63 shrines. Such state sponsorship was not available to other religious groups; however, in May 2004 Chief Minister Jayalalithaa announced her intention to halt all such support.

The Sangh Parivar's attempts over the past decade to take control of the Sufi syncretic (Hindu-Muslim) shrine known as Guru Dattatreya Baba Budan Swami Dargah at Chikmagalur in Karnataka continued to raise protests from secular groups. The centuries-old dargah is believed to have been one of the earliest centers of Sufism in the south. In recent years, Hindus have held many festivals at the site, alienating local Muslims.

In August, the Mumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) passed a resolution sponsored by the regional Hindu nationalist party, Shiv Sena, making the singing of the Sanskrit language patriotic song "Vande Mataram" compulsory in state funded schools. The resolution has not yet been implemented, as it is awaiting approval and comments by the Mumbai Municipal Commissioner. Some Muslim organizations objected, arguing that requiring Muslims to sing praises to anyone but Allah is against the precepts of Islam. Proponents of the singing noted that students in a number of Muslim majority schools have been singing the song, a favorite of Mahatma Gandhi's during the freedom struggle, for 30 years and teachers told the media that students and parents raised no objections.

In January, the Charity Commissioner in Gujarat sent letters mainly to Christian faith-based charities asking for their financial statements from the preceding 10 years, claiming that he was acting at the behest of the Government of Gujarat. The law governing charities only requires the submission of annual reports. Most charities objected to the measure and were excused. However, NGO sources alleged that several charities complied without raising any objection. Human rights and religious rights activists point to this instance as evidence of continued subtle pressure by the Government of Gujarat on minority-run institutions.

Between 1999 and 2003, the Gujarat government attempted to survey Christian families and agencies on a number of occasions. The police often carried out the surveys in the middle of the night. The surveys included questions about the number of converts in the household or parish, the circumstances of conversion, and the sources of funding received from abroad. The Government discontinued the exercise only after human rights and faith-based organizations appealed to the Gujarat High Court, arguing that they were illegal. No such surveys were conducted during the period of the report.

In 2003, the Gujarat Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Karsan Patel, publicly told tribal school children studying in a Christian-run school, "to decide whether they want to live as Hindus or die as Christians." Patel made this statement at a convention attended by more than 15,000 Hindus. The VHP distributed pamphlets at the convention urging Hindus to "reclaim" their territory from religious minorities.

There is no national law barring a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating his or her religious beliefs; however, speaking publicly against other beliefs is considered dangerous to public order, given the country's religious mix and past history, and is prohibited by the Foreigners Act. This law strictly prohibits visitors on tourist visas from engaging in religious preaching without first obtaining permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Given this context, the Government discourages foreign missionaries from entering the country without receiving prior clearance, and expels those who perform missionary work without the correct visa.

Long-established foreign missionaries generally can renew their visas, but since the mid-1960s, the government has refused to admit new resident foreign missionaries. During the period covered by this report, there were press reports documenting the activities of Christian missionaries who entered on tourist visas and illegally proselytized. This activity led to a public outcry and calls for the Government to enforce existing laws more rigidly. U.S. citizens accused of religious preaching while visiting India as tourists have been expelled and have faced difficulties obtaining permission to return for up to a decade after the event.

In 2003, a group of militant Hindus attacked and injured U.S. missionary Joseph Cooper in Kerala. The police arrested nine suspects in the case; however, their trial has not yet begun. The suspects were released after a few days; their leader and principal suspect in the case was not arrested, and the police claimed that he had left their jurisdiction. The state police ordered Joseph Cooper to leave the country,

on the day he was discharged from the hospital, reportedly because his tourist visa was incompatible with his missionary work.

The human rights groups Confederation of Human Rights Organisations and Peoples Watch of Tamil Nadu, in a joint fact-finding report in 2003, quoted then-Minister of State for Home Affairs Ch. Vidya Sagar Rao as saying that, “the action taken by the Kerala Police asking Cooper to leave the country within a week would send the right signal.” The report also quoted then-Minister of State for Urban Development O. Rajagopal as saying, “missionaries were making despicable remarks about Hindu deities,” and “the people will be forced to react if such actions go unchecked.”

In 2003, Gujarat police detained for questioning nine foreigners (eight Saudis and one Sudanese) for misusing their visas by preaching Islam in Gujarat. All were released without charge after a day in custody; reportedly they were in the country on tourist visas. There were no reports during the period covered by this report of Islamic preachers being detained.

In April 2004, Father Jim Borst, a priest at the Mill Hill Mission in Srinagar, who had worked in the country since 1963, was given a “Leave India Notice” from the Foreigner’s Registration Office in Kashmir. However, in July 2004, the Government permitted Borst to stay in India and continue his work. Borst had served as the principal of St. Joseph’s school in Baramulla and Burn Hall School in Srinagar and engaged in other educational activities in Jammu and Kashmir.

In June 2005, a mob assaulted four American missionaries in the Malwani suburb of Mumbai in western Maharashtra for allegedly converting Hindus to Christianity. The Government subsequently deported the missionaries, claiming they were carrying out religious activities while on tourist visas. Christian groups demanded an inquiry into the attack, stating the government’s failure to do so would trigger more such incidents.

Bureaucratic obstacles in getting visas renewed for foreign relief work also have hampered several Christian relief organizations. Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the FCRA, which limits overseas assistance to certain NGOs, including religiously affiliated groups. There were no reports of religious-based relief operations related to the 2004 Tsunami being hampered by the requirement.

The personal status laws of religious communities sometimes discriminate against women. Under Islamic law, a Muslim husband may divorce his wife spontaneously and unilaterally; there is no such provision for women. However, the Mumbai High Court ruled in 2002 that divorces of Muslim couples must be proven in court. Previously, a Muslim male’s assertion of a divorce was sufficient. Islamic law also allows a man to have up to four wives but prohibits polyandry.

In April, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board published a voluntary model “Nikahnama” (marriage contract) allowing prospective brides and grooms to incorporate restraints on the practice of “zubani talaq” (a man divorcing his wife by mere verbal assertion). The board asserted that a Muslim should not use a permanent triple talaq, but rather a single talaq, which incorporates a 3-month waiting period, during which the husband can reflect on the consequences of his action, change his mind, and reconcile with his wife. The guidelines also stipulate that any husband who divorces his wife should pay compensation to her family, that she should have equal property rights, not be subject to oral or physical abuse, not be prevented from meeting her family, and that talaq should be used only as a last resort when a marriage cannot be saved. The All India Muslim Women Personal Law Board (AIMWPLB) has out right rejected it and announced its plans to formulate a separate Nikahnama. “The model Nikahnama is just a formality and does not safeguard the interests of women and it is not acceptable to us,” stated AIMWPLB president Shaista Amber.

Under the Indian Divorce Act of 1869, a Christian woman could demand divorce only on the grounds of spousal abuse and certain categories of adultery; for a Christian man, a wife’s adultery alone was sufficient. However, in 2001 Parliament amended this law to allow Christian women to file for divorce for the same reasons as men.

The Indian Divorce Act of 2001 places limitations on interfaith marriages (such as inheritance laws and divorce) and specifies penalties, such as 10 years’ imprisonment, for clergymen who perform a marriage between a Christian and non-Christian in a church. However, the Indian Divorce Act does not bar the performance of interfaith marriage ceremonies in other places of worship.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While the Central Government has not been implicated in abuses of religious freedom, human rights activists have criticized it for alleged indifference and inaction

in the face of abuses committed by state and local authorities and private citizens. Although discrimination based on caste is officially illegal, it remains ubiquitous, stratifying almost every segment of society. Many members of lower castes are relegated to the most menial of jobs and have little social mobility. Dalits and other low caste members often convert to escape caste-based discrimination. Many face the wrath of fundamentalist Hindus, who view conversion as an attack on their religion. This backlash is almost always from the upper castes, which benefit economically and socially from the hierarchical system.

Weak enforcement of laws protecting religious freedom is partly due to an overburdened, outmoded, and corrupt judiciary. The archaic legal system has many years of backlog, and all but the most prominent cases move slowly. Official failure to deal adequately with intragroup and intergroup conflict and with local disturbances in some places has abridged in practice the right to religious freedom. The widespread belief that dalits and low caste Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are inferior and deserve their rank due to mistakes made in a prior life compounds the discrimination they face and further limits their religious freedom.

A federal system in which state governments hold jurisdiction over law and order contributed to the Central Government's ineffectiveness in combating religiously based violence. The only national law enforcement agency, the CBI, is required to ask state government permission before investigating a crime in the affected state. States often delay or refuse to grant such permission.

In 2000, the Government directed the Nanavati Commission to investigate the causes and course of violence during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. It delivered its report to the Government on February 9, 2005, but it has not been released to the public. News reports stated that the report confirmed that the riots were organized and systematic, but did not hold responsible the Congress government in power at the time.

The anti-Sikh riots, which followed the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards, lasted for approximately 4 days and resulted in more than 3,000 deaths. The assassination was in retaliation for Indira Gandhi's authorization of Operation Blue Star, during which the army assaulted terrorists holed up in Sikhism's holiest shrine, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, killing a prominent Sikh political leader and many of his supporters and damaging the complex. In October 2004, Amnesty International (AI) called for the perpetrators of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence to be brought to justice to heal the wounds of this period. AI stated that only a small minority of police officers responsible for the 1984 human rights violations has ever been prosecuted.

On December 2, 2004, nine persons were sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment for looting during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. On May 17, a Delhi court sentenced five persons to life imprisonment for burning a man to death during the riots. Also in May, the Delhi High Court ruled that the Government was liable for its failure to "protect the life and liberty of its citizens" and must pay \$2,860 (Rs 123,000) to all persons injured during the riots, a change from the previous decision to pay out \$46 (Rs 2,000) per victim. On June 28, a Delhi city court charged five men in a 1984 riot related case in which a policeman, his son and another relative were stabbed on a railway platform. The case has yet to come to trial.

In 2003, a Hindu mob attacked a peaceful Muslim protest in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, on the eve of the anniversary of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Two Hindus were stabbed to death; police arrested and charged approximately 35 persons from both communities.

Communal violence sparked by a traffic accident occurred in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, in October 2004. Police attempting to quell the violence were pelted with stones and responded with gunshots, killing one person and injuring three.

In February, activists from the Hindu nationalist Bajrang Dal attacked and beat a group of Christians in the Rajasthani town of Kota while they were attending a Christian graduation ceremony. The victims claimed that the local government was unsympathetic to their concerns and sided with the attackers, and that 275 persons were assaulted. Groups of Bajrang Dal activists subsequently set up checkpoints in the area to harass Christians attempting to leave by bus. The district government said it ended the harassment and took 37 Bajrang Dal members into custody. The NCM sent a two-member team to Kota to investigate and negotiate peace between the opposing sides.

In March, Christian groups in Rajasthan expressed concern over the state BJP government's plan to introduce an anti-conversion bill. However, by the end of the reporting period, Rajasthan had not introduced any such legislation.

In the Balmikinagar jungles bordering Nepal, police and the RSS have accused missionaries and Oraon tribal Christians of having "links" with the Maoist Communist Center (MCC), an insurgent group on the State Department's "Other Se-

lected Terrorist Organizations” list. As a result, priests have been detained and asked to leave the area. On June 15, police detained two priests and questioned them regarding alleged MCC ties. During the year, police detained more than 100 Oraon tribals for suspicion, causing a number of them to leave the area.

Some of the most severe anti-Muslim violence since India’s independence occurred in Gujarat from February to May 2002. On February 27, near Godhra, a fire broke out in two train cars of the Sabaramati Express, killing 58 Hindu passengers. A Commission headed by Justice Banerjee determined in its interim report, issued in January, that the fire may not have been arson, as opposed to what Hindu groups and the Gujarat government have alleged. Over the next 3 months, Hindu mobs in Gujarat, angered by the attack on the train (allegedly by Muslims) and incited and organized by members of the Sangh Parivar, destroyed Muslim businesses and raped Muslim women. The violence resulted in an estimated 2,000 deaths, a majority of them Muslims. In addition, 100,000 Muslims were forcibly displaced into makeshift camps throughout Gujarat. The Government closed the camps in mid-June 2002, forcing the displaced to return to burnt houses and destroyed property, with the perpetrators still at large. Human rights organizations and religious groups remain concerned about the increasing displacement and “ghettoization” in the Gujarati Muslim community.

A 2002 fact-finding team of women activists documented the effect of communal riots on women. The report stated that Muslim women had been subjected to “unimaginable, inhuman, barbaric” sexual violence during the riots, suffering rape, gang rape, and molestation. However, due to societal stigma, few of the raped women have filed charges.

Human rights activists reported that the Gujarat police received specific instructions not to take action to prevent a possible violent reaction by Hindus to the Godhra incident. Muslims and human rights activists alleged that the Gujarat police and the state reserve police many times sided with the attackers rather than with the victims. In some instances, police and government officials abetted the violence, and at times state security forces were responsible for abuses or assisted Hindu fundamentalists in attacking Muslims or Muslim owned businesses. Some police officers reportedly told Muslim victims, “We don’t have orders to help you.” It was reported that assailants frequently chanted, “the police are with us.”

In May, former Gujarat governor and senior BJP leader Sunder Singh Bhandari stated that the Narendra Modi government was at fault for delaying action against the rioters in 2002. He also charged that the BJP-led Central Government took the riots lightly and “did not react in a timely manner,” arguing that fewer persons would have died if action were taken sooner. On April 14, the Times News Network reported that Gujarat Additional Director General of Police RB Sreekumar alleged that the state’s Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, issued orders to eliminate minorities who attempted to block Hindu political and religious processions.

In its 2002 report, the NHRC held the Gujarat government responsible for the riots and accused it of “a complicity that was tacit if not explicit.” It concluded that “there is no doubt, in the opinion of this Commission, that there was a comprehensive failure on the part of the state government to control the persistent violation of rights of life, liberty, equality, and dignity of the people of the state.” The report recommended a Central Bureau of Investigation inquiry into the communal riots, which the state government refused to allow.

Instead, in April 2002, the Gujarat state Government appointed retired Supreme Court Justice G. T. Nanavati, who also led the inquiry into the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, to oversee a two-member judicial commission to investigate the violence. The group, known as Nanavati-Shah Commission, held hearings in various riot-affected districts of the state between May and November 2003, and at the end of the reporting period was investigating the role of the police, government officials, and the chief minister.

Initially, in May 2003, when the hearings commenced, human rights activists complained of police intimidation of witnesses and of a perfunctory approach by the commission to recording victims’ testimony. However, the board reportedly received more candid testimony from victims in subsequent months. It also warned the police during its hearings in September 2003 not to attempt to influence or terrorize the victims. Nevertheless, victims complained of threats and pressure from Hindu rightist groups not to testify. Justice Nanavati stated that he expects to submit a report by December 2005.

Besides the Nanavati-Shah Commission inquiry, various cases relating to the Gujarat violence were winding their way through the Gujarat judiciary. The Gujarat police reportedly downgraded charges against Hindu defendants, filed false charges to cover up their own role in the violence, deleted the names of the accused, and failed to pursue rape cases. A Home Ministry report, released in April 2003, stated

that 23,777 persons, predominantly Hindus, were arrested and charged in 2,014 cases in connection with the Gujarat violence. Most of the Hindus accused were able to secure bail, while Muslims remained in jail, because they were charged under POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act), under whose provisions bail can be easily denied. On June 22, the Central POTA Review Committee declared that there was not enough evidence to charge those accused in the Godhra train massacre case under the statute and recommended to the POTA court that charges be dropped. However, at the end of the reporting period the charges were still in effect.

According to the Government of Gujarat's January 2004 affidavit to the Supreme Court, 2,108 of the 4,256 cases registered in connection with the post-Godhra train burning violence have been categorized into a group of cases in which the State acknowledges that, while a crime happened, the circumstances could not be substantiated and no one could be charged. In August 2004, the Supreme Court directed the Gujarat police to review these cases and report whether the summary closure of continuing investigations was justified. By the end of the reporting period, the Gujarat police had not completed this review process. On June 22, the Home Ministry stated that it would allow the CBI to lead the investigation into the post-Godhra riots if the government of Gujarat agreed to hand over jurisdiction. The state government has not indicated its willingness to do so.

On May 12, the Government, for the first time, released official figures detailing the number of killed, injured, and missing as a result of the Gujarat riots. According to the Home Ministry, 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, 223 were reported missing and 2,500 injured. Some NGOs maintain the number of Muslims killed is higher than the official estimates, with figures ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 dead. The official number of Hindus killed included those killed in the Godhra Train fire.

Beginning in September 2004, at the direction of the Supreme Court, a retrial began in Mumbai of two high profile Godhra-related cases, the Bilkis Bano and Best Bakery Cases. (In the latter case, on March 1, 2002, a mob of Hindus attacked the Best Bakery in Vadodara, burning 14 persons, 12 of them Muslims, to death. In the former case, on March 2, 2002, a Muslim woman named Bilkis Bano was gang-raped, and her 14 relatives murdered as they were trying to flee from their village Randhikpur near Dahod in central Gujarat. Officers of the Gujarat police at Limkheda station refused to register her complaint. The police also allegedly tried to destroy the corpses and falsified the post mortem reports.)

In June 2003, a fast-track court in Vadodara acquitted the 21 accused in the Best Bakery case, since eyewitnesses refused to identify the alleged perpetrators in court. In July 2003, principal witness Zaheera Shaikh told Mumbai media that she had refused to identify the perpetrators in the Vadodara court because they had threatened her and her family. Zaheera, and Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), a human rights NGO, filed cases in the Indian Supreme Court in July 2003 asking for a retrial outside Gujarat. The Supreme Court granted the retrial in April 2004.

However, in November 2004, just prior to her planned testimony, Zaheera Shaikh told a Vadodara media conference that CJP convener and Mumbai-based human rights activist Teesta Setalvad had coached her to lie in her July 2003 media conference. She disowned her petitions to the Supreme Court, saying that she did not understand what she was signing. Subsequently, she testified in the Mumbai court that she could not see the perpetrators of the arson because of the smoke in her eyes. The depositions in the Best Bakery retrial continued. Meanwhile, the Indian Supreme Court appointed a special committee to examine Zaheera Shaikh's allegations against the CJP in general and Teesta Setalvad in particular. CJP and Teesta Setalvad have demanded a CBI inquiry. Zaheera Shaikh has not testified before the Nanavati-Shah Commission, but has reportedly written to the commission disowning her previous signed affidavits there. An Indian media organization claimed that its audiotapes proved that Zaheera received a large payoff from associates of the alleged arsonists for her November 2004 recantation and accusation against Setalvad.

None of the Hindus accused were charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA). Although many of the incidents of violence during the riots were witnessed by scores of observers, and some were televised, very few Hindus accused were convicted by the end of the period covered by this report. Human rights activists cited widespread intimidation of witnesses and judges, negligence by police, and shoddy prosecution by state authorities. Many Gujaratis reportedly were afraid of cooperating with the justice process.

Many Godhra-associated cases are likely to be appealed to the Gujarat High Court and later to the Supreme Court. Final judgments may not be handed down for many years. Human rights activists and minority groups remained skeptical that those guilty of the post-Godhra violence will be punished appropriately.

Human rights activists also argued that application of POTA has been selective in Gujarat. In May, the Central POTA Review Committee recommended POTA be withdrawn from the Godhra case. The three-member committee reported there was no ground for booking the accused under POTA, because there was no evidence of a conspiracy. Sources said the committee also determined that the fire was not a case of "waging a war against the nation," but the fallout of a scuffle between vendors at a railway station and passengers on the train. At the end of the reporting period, the POTA court had not dropped the charges.

None of the Hindus accused in the riot-related cases have been charged under POTA. However, POTA has been applied to approximately 124 of the 126 Muslims accused in the Godhra train arson case, to approximately 15 Muslims accused in the March 2003 Haren Pandya murder case, to those accused in the 2002 tiffin bomb case, and to Muslims accused in the alleged 2002 conspiracy between Indian Muslimism and Pakistan's Military Intelligence Agency (ISI) to kill Chief Minister Narendra Modi and then Union Home Minister L.K. Advani. In April, the national POTA review committee determined that almost all of the 200 accused under POTA in 15 cases (including the four above) in Gujarat have been Muslims. Lawyers for both the accused and the Gujarat government presented arguments before the committee. By the end of the reporting period, the committee had not ruled on any of the cases. The trial of the accused for Haren Pandya murder case continued, while the Indian Supreme Court stayed the Godhra case since April 2004.

POTA allowed for detention without charge for 6 months, summary trials, and the use of testimony exacted under duress. On September 21, 2004, President Kalam signed a bill repealing the POTA, and in December 2004, Parliament passed legislation implementing the repeal. However, POTA contains a sunset feature, which gives the Central POTA Review Committee a year to review all existing POTA cases. This clause allows the Government to make new arrests if they are tied to existing POTA cases. The Government can issue a new indictment on a case opened years ago under POTA, even against a person never previously associated with the case. It can also extend the 1-year limit for reviews. None of those arrested or charged under the POTA had been tried.

In 2002, attackers of the Swaminarayan Hindu Temple in Gujarat killed 40 persons before security forces stormed the temple and killed the terrorists. The Government responded swiftly by deploying approximately 3,000 army personnel to dispel a strike and protest march called by the VHP. Critics noted that had the Government acted as quickly following the Gujarat violence, many deaths, injuries and destruction of property could have been prevented. In November 2002, security forces ended a siege by suspected Muslim militants of two Hindu temples in Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir. Thirteen persons were killed in the raid, including 9 civilians, a soldier, a policeman, and the 2 assailants.

Furthermore, in March police in Gujarat detained at least 400 persons to prevent Hindu-Muslim clashes during a Shi'ite Muslim day of mourning (Muharram); the same month, Muslims called off a Muharram procession in the volatile town of Baroda to prevent potential clashes with Hindus. In October 2003, police arrested the leader of a hardline Hindu group along with thousands of activists planning to hold a rally at the disputed religious site of Ayodhya. No updates on these events were available during the reporting period.

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the country's only Muslim majority state, has been the locus of repeated armed conflict between India and Pakistan and internal fighting between security forces and Muslim groups, some of whom use terrorism, who demand that the state be given independence or be ceded to Pakistan. Particularly since an organized insurgency erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, there have been numerous reports of human rights abuses by security forces and local officials, including execution-style killings, beatings, rapes, and other physical abuse. Terrorist groups have also perpetrated similar atrocities, including car bombings targeting civilians, forcing villagers to shelter terrorists, and sexually assaulting villagers. Retaliatory killings by terrorists are also common. Terrorists also routinely targeted and slaughtered minority Hindu members of the Pandit community since 1989, resulting in mass exodus from these Hindus' homes and land to refugee camps in majority-Hindu Jammu or other parts of India.

Government forces deny allegations of excessive use of force and assert that they target persons on the basis not of religion but of involvement in terrorist activity or suspicion of terrorist links. For their part, terrorists killed and otherwise attacked hundreds of Hindu and Muslim civilians, including Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus, during the period covered by this report. On May 1, Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed's nephew, Attiqullah Shah, was fatally shot by separatist guerrillas.

It is difficult to separate religion and politics in Kashmir; Kashmiri separatists are predominantly Muslim, and almost all the higher ranks as well as most of the lower ranks in the Indian military forces stationed there are non-Muslim, although their proportions are consistent with the demographic makeup of the country as a whole. The vast majority of the Jammu and Kashmir police force of 61,000 is Muslims. Kashmiri Hindus, also known as Pandits, remained vulnerable to violence. Most Pandits lived in refugee camps outside of the valley and waited until they could safely return home. In 2003, for the first time in 14 years, the J&K government allowed a procession of separatist groups to mark the anniversary of the birthday of the prophet Muhammed. The procession was held again in May 2004 and 2005.

In 2002, two assailants, described by the Gujarat police as having connections to Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) and Laskhar Toiba (LET), captured Hindu and Sikh pilgrims at a Hindu temple in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. During a rescue operation, security forces killed 30 persons, including the attackers. Regional police officials said that the case remains under investigation.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

Forced religious conversion is illegal; however, NGOs claim the Government uses this law to restrict voluntary conversions. The issue of conversion, especially to Christianity, is highly contentious in the country. Hindu nationalist organizations frequently allege that Christian missionaries lure Hindus, particularly from lower castes, with offers of free education and healthcare. They equate such actions with forced conversions. Christians deny this, responding that low-caste Hindus convert of their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to “re-convert” these new Christians to Hinduism are themselves coercive.

In 2002, the Pondicherry state government ordered an inquiry into the alleged forced conversions of prisoners to Christianity by the superintendent of Pondicherry Central Prison. Six prisoners filed a complaint in Pondicherry claiming that they had been tortured after refusing to convert. There was no information available about this case during the reporting period.

In December 2003, International VHP Secretary Pravin Togadia addressed a gathering of 7,000 persons in the Surat District of Gujarat and claimed that 500 persons including a Catholic priest had reconverted in the state, and that since Gujarat is ruled by the BJP, he expected “to undertake many more shuddhikaran (purification) programs.” According to a media report, Togadia claimed that the VHP planned to reconvert all Christians residing in BJP ruled states to Hinduism by 2005, and “expose the global Christian conspiracy of conversions.” In Orissa, the VHP demanded the exhumation of the body of a Christian man buried in a Hindu cremation ground. The press reported on October 4, 2004, that the deceased man’s family gave written permission for the man to be reconverted to Hinduism in order for the body to remain in the cemetery.

Also in December 2003, members of a tribal Christian family, who fled violence in Tilonda Jambhulpada, a village in north Thane, Maharashtra, claimed that local police urged them to renounce Christianity. The family refused, and the Maharashtra State Minorities Commission intervened to assure police protection. The family returned to its village in February 2004; family members have not pressed charges.

In December 2003, the Maharashtra state Congress and Nationalist Congress parties banned the “Ghar Wapasi” (“Returning Home: Reconversion to Hinduism”) program, organized by the VHP, which planned to reconvert 400 tribal Christians to Hinduism in Nawapur in the tribal district of Nandurbar. Reportedly, the VHP distributed pamphlets in the region, saying that Christians had damaged Hindu temples and were bent on destroying the culture of Ram. The VHP shifted its program across the border to a village in BJP-ruled Gujarat and attempted a reconversion drive in Kerala.

Religious press outlets reported that on August 8, 2004, a group of Christians in Orissa were denied access by fellow villagers to the village well and employment opportunities when they returned to their village. Pastor Subas Samal and an associate had spent 6 weeks in jail under Orissa’s anti-conversion law. The pastor claimed he had attempted to find a solution to the conflict and that he never forced anyone to convert.

In February 2004, Hindu villagers in Jagatsingpur District, Orissa seized eight persons, including a local pastor and eight Christian women and shaved their heads. Villagers accused the pastor of forcibly converting two village women; however, the women denied this. In May 2004, the local police arrested six persons in connection

with the incident, and the pastor and the eight women remain in protected housing. No new information was available concerning these cases.

On September 26, 2004, approximately 35 Hindus in Kerala attacked four nuns and brothers belonging to the Missionaries of Charity after accusing them of converting Hindu villagers. Kerala police arrested 12 Hindu activists for the attack.

On October 17, 2004, approximately 300 tribal Christians were "reconverted" to Hinduism in a mass ceremony organized by the World Hindu Council in Orissa. Gauri Prasad Rath, state secretary of the Council, said it was the largest reconversion ceremony they had ever held. Christian leaders expressed shock and dismay at the news and the President of the All India Catholic Union, John Dayal, stated it was part of a vicious and hostile hate campaign. Other Christian leaders argued that Hindu groups were able to force Christians to convert because they depend on the Hindu majority for employment.

On January 19, in Assam, a mob set fire to a newly opened Catholic school, after accusing school staff of attempting to convert Hindus. Police arrived at the scene shortly after the incident and brought the situation under control, but not until after the school was destroyed.

Press reported that on February 14, a Hindu cleric in the Catholic village of Rajura, Maharashtra insisted that tribal Christians turn their church into a Hindu temple or face violent consequences. A witness stated that the cleric urged Hindu villagers to kill the Christian adivasis (tribal people) with swords.

Claims of forced conversion often result in an increase in communal tensions. In February, Hindu nationalists blamed the rape and murder of a 14-year-old girl in the town of Dhenkanal, Orissa on Christian missionaries. The victim's mother claimed that the missionaries had threatened the family if they did not convert to Christianity. The police rejected the conversion theory and were investigating the crime.

The press reported in April in Chandigarh that VHP activists planned to start an awareness campaign concerning the conversions of Sikhs to Christianity and protested "vehemently" against the practice. A VHP leader warned Christian missionaries "not to lay their hands on Punjab."

In April, NDTV reported that migrant laborers from Bihar were converting to the Sikh religion in an attempt to reduce discrimination against them in the agricultural and labor sectors in Punjab. The state has more than one million migrant laborers, largely from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, employed in agriculture and industry. Experts observed that the Bihari migrants, who are either low-caste or dalit Hindus, convert to escape widespread discrimination. In doing so, they become a more accepted part of Sikh society, but remain at the lowest end of the social and caste "hierarchy" of that religion.

Religious press outlets reported that Hindu activists in Chhattisgarh converted hundreds of Christians in a ceremony on April 2. A local newspaper reported on April 3 that senior BJP leader Dilip Singh Judeo threatened Christian workers during his address at the ceremony, stating that "if Christian missionaries don't stop converting people, we will take up arms."

The press reported that on April 17 in West Bengal, members of 45 tribal families reconverted to Hinduism from Christianity in a low-key ceremony. The ceremony was reportedly held under the banner of the Akhil Bharatiya Sanatan Santhal Samaj, an organization owing allegiance to the VHP. There was no indication that the conversions were forced, but the local administration is inquiring into the incident. Some of the "reconverted" were reportedly from neighboring states such as Jharkhand and Orissa. A Christian organization leader reported that the so-called reconversions were "dramas" staged by the VHP and that there was no proof that the reconverted were actual Christians. The group asserted that the intention was to put tribal Christians under pressure and to boost the morale of VHP activists in the area.

On May 1, the press reported that the VHP in Bargarh, Orissa, performed a re-conversion ceremony, also called a "homecoming" or "purification ceremony," for 567 Christians. The reconverted reportedly had signed affidavits declaring their intention to change their faith in keeping with the provisions of the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act. A Christian community leader in Orissa asserted that this mass reconversion was not genuine and was instead staged by the VHP to keep the communal issue alive. Religious press reported that approximately 600 Christian dalit tribals converted to Hinduism in Bijepur, Orissa, due to pressure from the VHP. Reportedly, Dharma Narayan Sharma, VHP national secretary, and Satyanarayan Panda, VHP vice-president for Orissa, attended the ceremony and two groups of armed police stood by.

On May 14, four Christian missionaries were arrested in Brajaraj Nagar, Orissa and charged with forced conversion. The police seized 70 Bibles, religious pam-

phlets, posters, and banners from the group. They stated the missionaries had been propagating the Christian faith under the guise of providing financial help to poor villagers. The missionaries had not received permission to perform conversions in the area, but they were released the following day.

Numerous religious press outlets reported that on May 15 and 16, Hindu extremists physically attacked 11 Christian families from Jamanya village in Maharashtra. The reports alleged that village officials summoned the families to a panchayat (community council of elders), which demanded that the families renounce their faith. When the families refused, the men were beaten with heavy sticks and chased from the village. On the following day, the mob attacked the women and children. Witnesses said the mob also tried to disrobe the women. Police maintain they are investigating the case.

In February, the NCM urged the governments of Rajasthan and Maharashtra to stop immediately forced reconversions of Christians and to provide security to Christians and their property. The action was in response to an attack on Christians in Kota and calls by Hindutva supporters for a social boycott against Christians who refuse to reconvert.

In February, the National Commission on Minorities (NCM) expressed concern about the rapid rate of growth of Christianity in the northeast states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Assam, Mizoram and Manipur. The 2001 census confirmed that nationwide the number of Christians remained stagnant at 2.9 percent, but the Christian population is decreasing in the south and increasing in the north. The press reported that the NCM would determine whether the rise in the Christian population in the north was caused by forced conversions. The NCM stated that the increase could also be attributed to false declarations by illegal Muslim migrants from Bangladesh who call themselves Christians.

The Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI), the apex body of the Catholic Church in India, expressed deep concern in February over allegations of forced reconversion of Christians in the Buldhan district of Maharashtra. The CBCI claimed that Hindu fundamentalists used intimidation and threats of "dire consequences" to induce Christians to return to Hinduism.

The VHP reported in February that it considered 2004 a successful year for reconversions, in that it brought 12,857 persons back "into the fold" of Hinduism, 3,727 from Islam and 9,130 from Christianity.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

Throughout the period covered by this report, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued to be a focus of terrorist violence. Terrorist adherents to a violent strain of Islam committed atrocities against Hindus and other Muslims, and security forces used targeted but often excessive force to suppress them, with civilians frequently the main victims. The death of suspected terrorists, all of whom are Muslim, is common while they are in police custody. Islamist terrorists tried to force Hindu Kashmiri Pandits to flee their ancestral homes in the Kashmir Valley. Although some 6,000 Pandits remained, more than several hundred thousand left when the violence against Hindus began in J&K in the late 1980s.

Between December 2002 and March 2003, approximately 30 Hindus were killed in bomb explosions in the Hindu-dominated areas of Ghatkopar, Parle, and in a commuter train in Mumbai. Police blamed Muslim students for these killings; there have been no arrests.

In March 2003, Islamist terrorists shot and killed 24 Hindus, including 11 women and 2 children in Nandimarg, Kashmir. In May 2003, Islamic extremists killed a Catholic nun and injured another in a grenade attack on Saint Lukas Convent School in Srinagar. In 2002, terrorists killed four members of a Hindu family in Jammu. There were no arrests or prosecutions in these cases. In May, terrorists threw grenades at the Tyndale-Biscoe School in Srinagar, killing two women and wounding 60 persons, including 25 children.

In 2003 in Arunachal Pradesh, a Christian missionary and four church leaders from Nagaland were arrested, allegedly for having ties to insurgent groups. They were released after 2 weeks' imprisonment without trial. The Chakhesang Baptist Church Council stated that the Naga missionaries were humanitarian workers.

Purvanchal Bhikkhu Sangha, an apex body of Buddhist monks in the Northeast, alleged that two factions of Naga militants from the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) served notices to Buddhists settled in Tirap and Changlang districts that they must accept Christianity. The NSCN and district authorities reportedly denied the accusation. There were no developments in these cases during the reporting period.

On May 22, militants detonated bombs at two movie theaters in New Delhi, killing one and injuring 60 during the screening of the Hindi film "Jo Bole So Nihal."

Sikh groups objected to the film, stating that it negatively portrayed members of their religion. The film takes its title from a Sikh battle cry, widely used across India and in the Indian Army. However, some Sikh groups have considered the title an insult to their faith. On May 31, police announced the arrest of two Sikhs in Punjab on suspicion of carrying out the attacks. Police reported that the two men were members of the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) terrorist group. The film was withdrawn from many cities, including in Punjab, after the Delhi blasts. BKI spread mayhem in Punjab during the 1980s and 1990s, but had become defunct after the terrorism in Punjab ended in the mid-1990s. At the end of the reporting period, the suspects were in detention.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government protected religious freedoms during the reporting period through speeches by the Prime Minister promoting communal harmony, the drafting of a model comprehensive law to deal with communal violence, the appointment of activists to high-level positions responsible for minority issues, the creation of a Commission for Minority Educational Institutions to improve minority access to education, the establishment of a national commission to determine effective ways to improve the social welfare of religious minorities, and the repeal of controversial legislation targeting minorities.

In a September 9, 2004, speech, Prime Minister Singh noted the importance of religious tolerance, stating, "Communal harmony is the sine qua non of a pluralistic society such as ours. Guarding and strengthening this core ideal, upon which our polity is based, requires ceaseless vigilance." Comments such as these, and UPA campaign promises to improve religious tolerance, have decreased communal tensions. Muslim and Christian activists reported that communal concerns have diminished since the UPA government came to power, bringing about a greater sense of security amongst minorities.

An influential Muslim correspondent stated in May that minority communities viewed government moves to change controversial school textbooks as an important gesture. The reporter commented that eliminating the Hindutva message from the books, and therefore from the minds of youth, will demonstrate the Government's dedication to a pluralistic and inclusive society. Activists commented that, while it is very difficult to accurately track incidents of communal violence, the feeling is that there has been a decrease since the UPA came to power.

The NHRC and NCM continued to promote freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. NHRC Secretary General, Nirmal Singh, stated in January that the NHRC and NCM are jointly planning a national policy on religious freedom, which they hope to release by the end of 2005. Through their annual reports and investigations, they focused attention on human rights problems and, where possible, encouraged judicial resolutions. For example, in July 2003, the NHRC ordered an internal investigation into the Best Bakery case and on August 1, 2003, filed a writ petition in the Indian Supreme Court. As a result, the state courts reopened approximately 2,000 cases. The NHRC asked that the Best Bakery case and nine other high profile cases be transferred outside of Gujarat. Due in part to the NHRC's actions, the Supreme Court transferred the case to the neighboring state of Maharashtra.

In October 2004, the Muslim social organization Jamat-e-Islami-Hind held a convention in Ahmedabad, Gujarat attended by more than 10,000 persons, calling for a halt to the spread of terrorism and for the Muslim community to confront the challenges posed by illiteracy and discrimination. It was the first time the group held such a gathering since the 2002 riots. In 2002 and 2003, the community did not hold large-scale religious processions or gatherings due to fear of reprisal attacks from Hindu nationalists.

In keeping with the UPA's campaign promises to oppose communal violence, the Government refused to sanction the Gujarat Control of Organized Crime Act (GUCJOC), passed by the Gujarat legislature in June 2004. Muslim groups feared the law would be used selectively against them, as it is similar to POTA at the union level and to the MCOC (Maharashtra Control of Organized Crime), both of which they allege have been applied overwhelmingly against Muslims. The Gujarat government claims this legislation targets organized crime at the state level, but opponents claim it would give too much power to the state. The act would have allowed the state government to imprison a person for 5 years for harboring a member of an organized crime syndicate. It also contained provisions permitting those arrested under the act to be held in jail without trial and tried in special courts.

The NHRC and the NCM continued to pursue unilateral action not prompted by specific complaints or legal demands, directing the Central Government and Gujarat state government to take corrective measures to address the 2002 violence. As a di-

rect result of this warning, the Central Government created a special compensation package for the victims of the Gujarat violence; however, a majority of victims have yet to be compensated. The NHRC also directed the Gujarat state government to entrust certain Gujarat cases to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), to support NGOs working on behalf of religious minorities and to reform the police.

NGOs reported that on September 15, 2003, a Special CBI Court in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, convicted Dara Singh and 12 accomplices for the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his 2 minor sons (another person was acquitted for lack of evidence). Singh received the death sentence while the others were sentenced to life imprisonment. However, on May 19, the Orissa High Court commuted Singh's sentence to life imprisonment, upheld the life sentence decision for one of his accomplices, Mahendra Hembram, and acquitted the other 11 defendants. Singh has been charged with three other murders and still faces trial in those cases.

On June 1, 2003, then-Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani was charged with criminal conspiracy for his role in the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, which sparked violent riots in 1992; the charges were dismissed in September 2003 when the court ruled that there were no grounds for continuing the action. As of June, no further developments had occurred.

During the reporting period, there were numerous events organized to promote religious tolerance and accord. In November 2004, the Ati Mana Vishnu Committee organized a peace rally in Jammu. The group stated that more than 20,000 persons from many countries took part in the celebration. Also, in Visakhapatnam a conference attended by members of "all faiths" took place in September to promote religious harmony. In Hyderabad, a large number of Muslims took part in a Hindu procession through the minority-dominated areas of the old city with no acts of violence.

On February 26 in Kerala, the first Catholic TV channel began broadcasting. The channel, Shalom Television, airs programs on religion, art, music, history, and education. Numerous other TV channels air religious programming on cable networks.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Animosities within and between religious communities have roots that are centuries old, and these tensions at times exacerbated by poverty, class, and ethnic differences, have erupted into periodic violence since independence. The Government makes some effort, not always successfully, to prevent these incidents and to restore communal harmony; however, tensions between Muslims and Hindus, and between Hindus and Christians continue to pose a challenge to the concepts of secularism, tolerance, and diversity on which the country was founded.

From January to September 2004, the Home Ministry reported there were 32 incidents of communal violence involving Christians, resulting in 2 deaths. During the same period, it reported 451 incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence, resulting in 95 deaths. From 2003 to 2004, diplomatic observers estimated that there were 17 reported attacks against the Muslim community and 30 against the Christian community. From 2002 to 2003, there were approximately 11 attacks against the Muslim community and 69 cases against Christians, as well as 4 cases against Hindus in Gujarat, Mumbai and J&K. Some attacks were motivated by economic issues or existing nonreligious disputes; others were purely religious in motivation.

There were no reported incidents of Hindu-Muslim strife in the states of Chhattisgarh, Goa, or Madhya Pradesh during the period covered by this report.

Within the Indian context, the phrase "communal violence" generally is understood to mean Hindu-Muslim conflict. Hindus and Muslims continue to feud over the existence of mosques constructed centuries ago on sites where Hindus believe that temples stood previously.

Extremist Hindu groups such as the VHP and Bajrang Dal maintain that they intend to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya on the site of the 500-year-old Babri Mosque demolished by a Hindu mob in 1992, with or without the Government's approval. In March 2003, the Supreme Court decided against the Central Government's application to rescind a ban on religious activity at the site, whereupon the then Prime Minister Vajpayee promised to continue with plans to build a temple where the razed Muslim mosque had stood. Thousands of police and paramilitary troops were deployed in and around Ayodhya, and most Hindu militants were stopped from entering the town for a March 15, 2003 religious ceremony. In October 2003, police arrested 1,500 Hindu nationalists, alleging that their campaign to build the new temple could lead to violence.

In February 2003, in Madhya Pradesh, a Hindu group demanded greater access to the Bhojshala monument that Muslims claim as the site of a 15th century mosque. The courts have restricted Hindu access to one religious ceremony per year

since 1996. Two persons died in rioting after Hindu extremists stormed the site. In response to Hindu demands, the Archeological Survey of India permitted Hindus to worship on Tuesdays, while Muslims continued to have access every Friday. In July 2003, a group of Muslims filed a writ petition in the Madhya Pradesh high court challenging the central and state government's order to open the shrine to Hindus. The 85-page petition said that according to Islamic law, a mosque could not be used for any other purpose. On September 18, 2003 the court upheld the decision to open the site for the Hindu community and on April 27, 2004 the High Court rejected a further plea to close the mosque to Hindus.

In September 2003, the Lucknow High Court ordered the federally run Archeological Survey of India to excavate the Ayodhya site to determine if a Hindu temple ever existed below the destroyed mosque. It released a report in August 2003 claiming to document the existence of pillars and other masonry that could be viewed as evidence of a Hindu temple. Archeological scholars attacked the report as vague and unclear. In May 2004, the new government announced that it would await the verdict of the courts, while encouraging negotiations aimed at an amicable settlement. Excavations were ongoing.

A July 2004 report in the Urdu press highlighted the Muslim community's sensitivity to threats to their religious sites. According to the report, the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) planned to move the Sidha Jama Masjid mosque, located on National Highway 6 in the Midnapore district of West Bengal to make way for road expansion. When the NHAI started proceedings to acquire the land under the Land Acquisition Act, local Muslims approached the West Bengal Minorities Commission to prevent the relocation. When the NHAI did not respond to commission requests for information, Muslims took the case to the Calcutta High Court, which ordered the mosque to be moved "in the public interest." In their appeal, Muslims stated that they fear the order will create a precedent allowing mosques across the country to be relocated.

The same report alleged that airport authorities in Calcutta wanted to acquire another area where a mosque, madrassah, tomb of a saint, and a graveyard were situated to extend the airport. The case is pending in the courts.

In the second week of September, the VHP led an unsuccessful attempt to demolish the tomb of a 17th century Muslim warrior in Pratapgarh in Mahabaleshwar district. During the agitation, several Muslim families left their homes, fearing violence, but later returned. In the above mentioned incidents, the state police moved swiftly to control damage and there were no allegations of anti-Muslim bias by the police in handling of the incidents.

Muslims continued to experience intimidation and often reported that they could not work, reside, or send their children to schools in Hindu-dominated areas. In some areas, primarily in Gujarat, Hindutva groups displayed signs stating "Hindus only" and "Muslim free area." Prohibitions on the Muslim call to prayer were also reported.

Human rights groups expressed concern that those responsible for the Gujarat violence of 2002 may never be tried or convicted for their crimes. They charged that although the Government arrested thousands following the attacks, most were acquitted, released on bail with no further action taken, or simply released. In addition, Muslim victims often faced biased prosecutors, and judges and lawyers representing Muslim victims faced harassment and threats. Riot victims claimed that Hindu nationalists sabotaged efforts to prosecute Hindus involved. Witnesses who initially came forward to file reports with the police and identify their attackers were reportedly harassed, threatened, or bribed into retracting their statements or not showing up at court.

In 2002, Shiv Sena leader Balasaheb Thackeray called upon his followers to form Hindu suicide squads to combat Muslim extremists. The Maharashtra government filed charges against Thackeray under the Penal Code for "causing a rift amongst two communities." The charges were still pending at the end of the period covered by this report and it is unlikely any action will be taken against him.

In May 2003, Muslim extremists killed eight Hindus in the Kerala village of Marad. A special investigation team of Kerala police arrested 140 persons in connection with the incident, many of who were members of the National Democratic Front, an Islamic organization. Reportedly 400 Muslim families fled the area in fear of Hindu retaliation. Of the 400, approximately 250 hoped to return, but stiff opposition from local groups backed by the VHP forced the government to put off plans to resettle them in the community.

When a family did return, threats from a local group called Araya Samajam compelled them to depart. In August 2003, Araya Samajam President K Dasan led a crowd to the house of one Muslim returnee and threatened him and his family. The man and his family subsequently returned to a government-run refugee camp. The

police registered cases against Dasan and 20 others. The VHP and other groups insisted that they will not allow refugees to return unless the government orders a Central Bureau of Investigation inquiry into the killings, gives \$23,000 (Rs 10 lakh) compensation to each victim's family, and forces Industry Minister P K Kunhalikutty, whom they accuse of orchestrating the attack, to resign. According to them, some of those arrested in connection with the case belong to Kunhalikutty's party, the Indian National Muslim League.

Also in Kerala, RSS activists attacked a mosque, killing one Muslim man and injuring two others, including the imam. The deceased was alleged to be a member of the National Democratic Front (NDF), which clashed on a number of occasions with the RSS during the year.

In July 2004, Hindus in the village of Mankni near Vadodara, Gujarat launched a 2-month economic boycott against Muslims following the murder in June of Sanjay Patel, a Hindu operator of an illegal betting racket, allegedly at the hands of his former business partner, a Muslim. The alleged murderer's family relocated from the village.

On July 4, 2004, approximately 300 Bajrang Dal activists attacked a Muslim-owned hospital in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, destroying property valued in the hundreds of dollars and causing patients to flee. The activists were protesting the elopement of a Hindu girl with a Muslim worker from the hospital canteen. The police registered a complaint, but at the end of the reporting period, there had been no arrests.

In July 2004, in Gujarat, rioters killed 2 persons, injured 20, destroyed 40 houses and 15 shops and looted property worth thousands of dollars after an alleged incident of sexual harassment of a Hindu girl by Muslim youth. In September 2004, also in Gujarat, minor clashes during a Hindu religious procession resulted in property damage but no injuries or deaths.

On August, 27, 2004, unknown assailants threw crude bombs outside two mosques in Poorna and Jalna towns of Central Maharashtra, just after Friday prayers. Eighteen worshippers were injured in the blasts.

In the first week of September 2004, in Maharashtra, minor riots in the towns of Jalna and Poorna led to property damage but no loss of life following bomb blasts at two mosques during Friday prayers.

The press reported on October 27, 2004, that the S J Dave High School in Gujarat, 25 kilometers from Godhra, has for the past 6 years required its students to wear patches associating them with their religion. Hindu students had the Goddess Saraswati on their patches and Muslims a star. Recently, two school trustees objected to the practice, and the District Education officer asked the school to stop it. The school has agreed to do so. Opponents of the patch requirement expressed concern that if not stopped, the practice would enable continued discrimination against Muslims in educational institutions.

Sectarian violence in October 2004 also claimed the lives of two Muslims clerics in the town of Orai in Uttar Pradesh. Imam Haji Fahim Khan Ghori was shot and killed while returning home after morning prayers. In retaliation, hundreds of his followers killed Maulana Bashir Ahmad Quadari, a member of a rival faction, and ransacked his house. Police reported the violence was sparked by a conflict over control of a religious site.

Three persons were killed and 15 others injured on February 20 in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, when sectarian violence between two Muslim groups erupted over a disputed procession. The trouble started when members of one sect attempted to prevent a procession by the other from going through their area. It was the first major incident in Lucknow associated with Muslim sectarianism since 1977.

In Assam during April, Chief Maulana Syed Asad Madani, leader of the Muslim social organization Jamiat Ulema I-Hind, criticized the state government for its alleged failure to protect Muslim interests, highlighting land reform, job reservations and the issuing of identity cards as problem areas, and demanded that the state government show progress within 6 months.

Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants generally are relegated to low-paying jobs and low social status. They face harassment and discrimination that stems from their status as undocumented laborers.

In Assam, where the population is increasing rapidly, the issue of Bangladeshi migrants long has been sensitive among the Assamese (predominantly Hindu) population, which considers itself increasingly outnumbered. In 2003, VHP leader Praveen Togadia announced that within 6 to 8 months, he would mobilize a campaign against "Bangladeshi infiltrators." No new information is available on his threat.

In August 2004, there were press reports that the Buddhist community was deeply concerned over rising incidents of harassment and persecution of Buddhist tribals by militants and security forces alike, particularly in the northeast. Reportedly, the predominantly Christian National Socialist Council of Nagaland—Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland—Khaplang (NSCN-K) demanded land belonging to Buddhists and local indigenous faiths in villages in Tirap and Changlang district. The press also reported that both groups were urging Buddhists to convert to Christianity.

In May, Akhil Kumar Sahoo, General Secretary of the Orissa Buddhist Front, lamented that the state government had taken no administrative or legal steps towards recognition of the Buddhist community. He claimed that most Buddhists were leading a “miserable life” due to the absence of social security measures or financial assistance from the Government. He argued that while the state government observes 16 Hindu festivals, four Muslim festivals, two Christian festivals and one Sikh festival as government holidays, no occasion of importance to the Buddhists, including Lord Buddha’s Birthday, has that status. Although the NCM had directed the state government to declare the birthdays of Lord Buddha and Sikhism’s founder Guru Nanak as state holidays, only Guru Nanak’s birthday has been recognized.

Leaders of the Tibetan Buddhist community in south India commented during the year that relations with the Government and local residents were good and that they did not feel persecuted. In May, a leading Buddhist Monk stated that tensions between Tibetans and their largely Hindu neighbors occurred for economic rather than religious reasons.

Radical ethnic and religious groups carried out attacks on the media during the reporting period. In June, radical Shiv Sena elements attacked the Mumbai office of the newspaper *Aapla Mahanagar*, assaulted the editorial staff, and damaged office equipment in response to an article written against a Hindu religious sect. In August, in Mumbai, alleged Muslim fundamentalist activists attacked the editor of a Hindi language newspaper, Sajid Rashid, with knives and seriously injured him, charging that he had insulted Islam. Mumbai police filed charges in the case, but the assailants remained at large and the investigation open at the end of the reporting period.

In Christian-majority areas, there were occasional reports that Christians persecuted members of regional minorities. In Tripura, there were several reported cases of harassment of non-Christians by members of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a militant evangelical tribal group.

The All-India Catholic Union (AICU) expressed deep concern over growing anti-Christian violence in several states following the defeat of the BJP in the national elections in May 2004. The AICU claimed that the perpetrators were members of fundamentalist groups affiliated with the RSS.

The eastern region presented a varied picture of religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Sporadic attacks continued but were not concentrated in one geographical area. In Orissa, which has been known for violence against religious minorities (particularly after the killings of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young children in 1999), the communal situation continued to be of concern during the period covered by this report.

In 2003, a Hindu mob attacked construction workers building a church and looted construction material in Sudusudia village in Orissa. Following a local inquiry, the magistrate found the construction to be illegal because it was purportedly on agricultural land. No official action was taken against those who destroyed the structure and stole material, and no arrests were made.

In November 2003, VHP and Bajrang Dal fundamentalists attacked churches and a nun in Deogarh, west Orissa. Hindu militants burned a Catholic church, bibles and other Christian literature in front of the residence of the District Governor. In Rajamunda village, they broke into a church and raped a nun. The Hindu activists questioned four former Hindus in Amulpani village who had become Catholics. In Jhareikela, they damaged the home of a Protestant pastor and destroyed Christian books.

In August 2004, at least 300 persons broke into a Catholic church in Raikia, Orissa, and smashed religious statues, doors, and windows. The mob also burned a truck parked outside the church as well as pictures and clothes taken from the church. The incident occurred after some Christians protested the removal by Hindus of fencing encircling the church. The local police brought the situation under control, but took no further action against the perpetrators.

On September 15, 2004, in Orissa, a nun was seriously burned when an unidentified man threw acid on her.

In October 2004, in the Orissa town of Baripada, a local court sent five Christian preachers to police custody for “inciting communal feelings.” After engaging in

Christian preaching during a Hindu ceremony, they were arrested for “uttering words with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of others and issuing threats of criminal intimidation to several persons.”

Two Christian pastors were killed in the eastern state of Orissa within a 2-week period in early 2005. On February 16, Baptist pastor Gilbert Raj, who had been working in the state for 13 years, was tortured and killed. Ten days later, Pentecostal pastor Dilip Dalai was stabbed to death. Christian groups claimed they were murdered to stop their missionary work.

On February 27, a group of persons attacked Christian evangelist Kiran Kumar while he was returning home after holding a prayer meeting in Orissa. The police took him into custody, alleging he was attempting to forcibly convert persons, but he was later released.

Authorities in Orissa ceased the demolition of 108 Christian families' houses after Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik intervened. The demolition was ordered before the monsoon period, reportedly as part of a beautification process in Jeypore; however, the affected families were convinced that the RSS was behind the decision.

On June 14, Sangh Parivar activists disrupted the Indian People's Tribunal on Environmental and Human Rights's hearing on the communal situation in Orissa. The activists harassed tribunal members and threatened to rape them and parade them through the streets.

In January 2005, in the town of Ambarnath near Mumbai, a Hindu group attacked a small convent of the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites, and broke a wooden cross. The nuns locked themselves in the convent and were not harmed. The group left pamphlets ordering the nuns to leave the area. By the end of the reporting period, the police were investigating the attack but had made no arrests.

In the southern state of Kerala, the Home Ministry reported in May that 2 persons were killed in communal violence in 2004, down from 11 killed in 2003 and 6 in 2002. The report stated two major communal riots took place during the 2002 to 2004 period. Five persons were killed and 25 seriously injured in the first incident, which took place in 2002. The government subsequently spent \$23,000 (Rs 10 lakh) to repair 91 damaged houses. The second incident took place in May 2003, resulting in the death of 9 persons and injury to 17. The government compensated the families of the dead with a grant of approximately \$23,000 (Rs 10 lakh) and guaranteed employment for one dependent from each affected family. The injured received grants ranging from \$6,900 (Rs 300,000) to \$11,500 (Rs 500,000).

Christians in Kerala alleged that a ritual at a Hindu temple led to the murder of a 71-year-old Syrian Catholic priest. Father Job Chittilapilly was murdered on August 28, the day of Kerala's annual harvest festival. Sources said the local Hindu priest told adherents that the death of a Christian priest would appease the soul of a Hindu priest murdered at the temple site 20 years ago. Church members reported that the priest had received intimidating telephone calls threatening him with death if he did not cease to “proselytize.” Panthalkootam Raghu Kumar was arrested for the murder and the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) has called for a thorough investigation, claiming Father Job's murder was part of a conspiracy to destroy interreligious harmony in Kerala.

On September 25, 2004, also in Kerala, BJP activists attacked two groups from the group Missionaries of Charity. The nuns and brothers were on their way to visit a colony of dalits to distribute food when the incident occurred. Five persons shouting pro-BJP slogans and wielding iron bars attacked the first group, causing a head injury to one person. In the second attack, approximately 30 persons damaged a Mission of Charity van and injured a nun. The police arrested 14 RSS-BJP sympathizers in connection with the attack, and the NCM requested that Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy investigate.

On April 1, Hindu and Muslim villagers burned down a prayer hall and physically attacked three Christian church members following a baptism ceremony in Kerala. Two days later, villagers assaulted Pastor Paul Ciniraj Mohammed and his 54-year-old assistant.

During a screening of the film “The Passion of the Christ” on Easter eve in the town of Chalakud Taluna, Kerala, approximately 25 Hindu fundamentalists from the RSS attacked a group of Christians, injuring one man and beating a number of others, including children.

In June, the Jodhpur District Administration in Rajasthan rescinded permission for the Pentecostal Church of God to hold a gathering in the city after protests by activists from the VHP and Bajrang Dal. The Hindu activists claimed that the church was converting Hindu children, prompting the government to cancel the gathering to prevent violence. A Congress Party official claimed that the administration caved to communal pressures from Hindu activists and had no right to withdraw permission for the event.

During July 2004, in Manipur, the bullet-ridden body of Pastor Jamkholet Khongsai of Saichang village was found buried in the jungle. The paramilitary Assam Rifles, who had taken him away while hunting for Kuki militants in the village, allegedly killed him. The Kuki Movement for Human Rights filed a complaint with the Manipur Human Rights Commission, demanding an inquiry into the killing, punishment of the culprits, and adequate compensation to the victim's family.

Despite threats from Hindu extremists, Christians sometimes held large public prayer meetings without violence or protests. For example, on May 13, a leading Christian evangelist spoke in New Delhi and the event, attended by more than 3,000 persons, was peaceful, with a moderate police presence and no Hindu activist group protests.

In 2004, the state of Andhra Pradesh remained peaceful in 2004 except for a few sporadic incidents of communal disturbances. The government of Andhra Pradesh reported that communal disturbances declined from 191 cases with 3 deaths in 2003 to 30 cases with no deaths in 2004.

On June 2, police in Andhra Pradesh found the body of Pastor Isaac Raju, missing since May 24. According to the All-India Christian Council, his body was found wrapped in a jute bag outside the state capital, Hyderabad. This was the second case of disappearance and death of a Christian minister in Andhra Pradesh in 2005. On May 21, the body of K. Daniel, a preacher from Kummavadi, also on the outskirts of Hyderabad, was found bearing marks suggestive of an acid attack. Press reported that in both cases a person called and gave precise directions on the location of the body. Church members claim the killings were planned to terrorize the Christian community. The Associated Press reported that police questioned at least 150 members of Hindu nationalist groups after an anonymous letter was sent to a local newspaper, claiming the murders were carried out by an organization called the "Anti-Christian Forum." Following the recovery of Raju's body, the state government formed a Special Investigation Team to find those responsible for the murders. The Home Minister also offered protection to Christian missionaries living in the state. In June, police arrested Kokala Govardhan for the murder of Daniel and Raju. Govardhan admitted that he killed the two pastors for converting Hindus to Christianity and was inspired by news reports of Dara Singh's murder of missionary Graham Staines and his two children in 1999. The police were searching for two other accomplices.

There were no further developments in two incidents of anti-Christian violence in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh that took place in January and March 2004. In the incidents, Hindu mobs attacked local Christians, damaging property and beating a priest following the rape and death of two Hindu minor girls. One Hindu activist was killed during the violence allegedly by a shot fired from a church. The police charged several persons in these two cases, but the cases have not come up for hearing.

In April 2003, Hindu extremists in Gujarat vandalized a municipal health care dispensary destroyed in the earthquake of 2001 and rebuilt with the support of a Christian organization, destroying the dedication stone listing the names of the donors and painting Hindutva slogans on the walls. No arrests had been made by the end of the reporting period.

In March 2004, the police briefly arrested village priest Father Prasad Gonsalves on charges of sexually harassing a Hindu woman in Radhanpur village in North Gujarat. Christian organizations have alleged that the woman wanted to extort money from the priest and filed a false complaint against him. The priest was released on bail.

Between January and June 2003, Christian leaders in Karnataka recorded 50 incidents, ranging from destruction of church property to physical abuse of ministers and converts. Reportedly, members of the Sangh Parivar were responsible. None of the incidents were investigated. State authorities did not deny that violence had occurred, but claimed that the attacks did not represent an organized effort to deter evangelists.

In October 2003, Father Swami, of the Archdiocese of Bangalore, was found dead in Karnataka after being beaten. Months earlier he had been threatened by Hindu fundamentalists. There was no new information concerning this case at the end of the reporting period.

The media reported the murder of a 25-year-old Christian evangelist Pastor Narayan in Channapatana in Karnataka on February 11. Official autopsy reports show the case as a suicide, but Christian groups allege that Hindu extremists were responsible.

On July 31, 2003, 250 persons, most of whom were members of the VHP, attacked students and staff members of a Bible school in Dabwali, Haryana, burning Bibles and Christian literature, vandalizing the school, and beating students. The assail-

ants accused the school of converting local Hindus. No new developments in this case occurred during the reporting period.

On October 26, 2003, in the city of Roorkey in Uttaranchal, an 80-person mob attacked Christians participating in a prayer meeting.

On November 15, 2003, a grenade was launched at the Good Shepherd Catholic School in Pulwama in Kashmir; three office staff and a security guard were injured. Muslim fundamentalists were suspected. No new information is available.

On March 9, 2003, Hindu extremists reportedly burned the roof of a church in Tamil Nadu. The District Collector, under pressure from the local RSS, denied permission to church leaders to use fire retardant roofing materials in the church reconstruction. The church presbyter feared this prohibition would invite another arson attack. No further developments have been recorded.

According to the Home Ministry, from 2002 to 2003, approximately 56,246 Pandit families fled their homes in J&K due to the anti-Hindu violence perpetrated by Muslim insurgents and terrorists. Of these refugees, 4,778 families still were living in 12 refugee camps in Jammu at the end of the period covered by this report, and 238 families also were still in Delhi's 14 camps, with the remainder living elsewhere.

The Pandit community criticized the bleak physical, educational, and economic conditions in the camps and feared that a negotiated solution giving greater autonomy to the state's Muslim majority might prevent their return and threaten the continued survival of the Pandit community in J&K.

The slaughter of cows, which are considered holy by Hindus, sometimes has led to violence. Several state governments (including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat) have passed laws prohibiting slaughter of bovine species. Hindu nationalists often forcibly implement these laws themselves. In January 2003, Hindus destroyed Muslim-owned shops, restaurants, and vehicles in Madhya Pradesh over an alleged incident of cow-slaughter. In February 2003, the Hindu extremist group Bajrang Dal clashed with Muslim youth over alleged instances of cow slaughter. In the altercation, 34 persons, including 26 police officers, were injured. No new information was available concerning these cases.

On July 10, 2004, a Muslim farmer tried to sell a bull at the Barghat weekly market, located approximately 20 kilometers from the town of Seoni in Madhya Pradesh. Several Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal activists accosted him, accusing him of trying to sell his bull to a butcher and beat him to death. The district police arrested the attackers. In March, in Kota, Rajashtan activists from the Bajrang Dal clashed with a Muslim over the possession of a cow, leaving two persons injured. One member of the Bajrang Dal was beaten up when he attempted to stop the slaughter of a cow in Kota. In retaliation, a group from the Bajrang Dal clashed with the minority group, injuring one.

Violence against Christian missionaries occurred on numerous occasions in a number of states throughout India during the reporting period.

Christian missionaries have been operating schools and medical clinics for many years in tribal areas. Tribals have no caste status, and dalits are at the bottom of the caste system. Both have made socioeconomic gains because of assistance provided by missionary schools and other institutions.

Some upper-caste Hindus, fearing that conversions by Hindu tribals and dalits to Christianity might weaken and ultimately destroy the rigid caste hierarchy, committed acts of violence against Christians. This fear was highlighted by an August 15, 2003, statement by then Prime Minister Vajpayee that "there is a conversion motive behind the welfare activities being carried out by some Christian missionaries in the country's backward areas, and it is not proper, although conversion is permissible under the law."

Citizens often referred to schools, hospitals, and other institutions as "missionary" even when they are owned and run entirely by indigenous Christian citizens. By using the adjective "missionary," the RSS tapped into a longstanding Hindu fear of foreign religious influence and possible domination. Several Christian-affiliated (in many cases, nonevangelical) international relief agencies stated that during the year, threats, increased bureaucratic obstacles, and, in some cases, physical attacks on their field workers by Hindu extremists made it considerably more difficult for them to deliver services to the poor.

On February 5, 2003, in Gujarat, a Catholic, Anthony Rebello, and a Hindu, Reema Sompura, were married in a legal Hindu marriage ceremony. VHP and Bajrang Dal members subsequently attacked the couple, kicking Mrs. Rebello in the stomach and aborting her baby. When they tried to file a complaint at the police station, police separated the couple and VHP and Bajrang Dal members again beat Mr. Rebello. No action has been taken against the VHP and Bajrang Dal members responsible for this attack.

The country's caste system historically has been an integral part of Hinduism, but has also migrated into Christianity, Islam and Sikhism in the subcontinent. Hinduism delineates clear social strata, assigning highly structured religious, cultural, and social roles, privileges, and restrictions to each caste and sub-caste. Members of each caste (and frequently each sub-caste) are expected to fulfill a specific set of duties (known as dharma) to secure elevation to a higher caste through rebirth.

Dalits are viewed by many Hindus as separate from or "below" the caste system; nonetheless, they too are expected to follow their dharma if they hope to achieve caste in a future life.

Societal, political, and economic pressures continue to thwart efforts by reform-minded leaders to eliminate the discriminatory aspects of caste. The caste system generates severe tensions due to its support for disparities in social status, economic opportunity, and, occasionally, labor rights.

These tensions frequently have led to or exacerbated violent confrontations and human rights abuses. Generally, intercaste violence does not have a significant religious component.

The President has the authority to specify historically disadvantaged castes, dalits, and "tribals," in a schedule attached to the Constitution. These groups are entitled to affirmative action and hiring quotas in employment, benefits from special development funds, and special training programs.

The effect of reservations and quotas on society and on the groups they are designed to benefit is a subject of active debate within the country. Some contend that reservations have achieved the desired effect and should be modified, while others strongly argue that they should be continued in their present form or expanded, as Indian society has not yet addressed adequately the long-term discriminatory impact of caste. According to the 1991 census, scheduled castes, including dalits, made up 16 percent of the population, and scheduled tribes made up 8 percent; data from the 2001 census has yet to be released.

Dalit converts to Christianity and Christians who have a dalit background claimed that societal discrimination against them continued, even within the Christian community. One indicator of the continued discrimination against dalit Christians within their own community was that, of the 180 Catholic bishops in the country, only 5 were dalits. Muslim dalits, who account for most of the country's 130 million Muslims, also were not counted as dalits in the census. Muslim leaders have not vigorously protested the census issue.

In 2001, Human Rights Watch reported that the practice of dedicating or marrying young, prepubescent girls to a Hindu deity or temple as "servants of god," or "Devadasis," reportedly continues in several southern states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devadasis, who generally are dalits, may not marry. They must live apart from their families and are required to provide sexual services to priests and high caste Hindus. Reportedly, many eventually are sold to urban brothels. The Devadasi tradition is linked, to some degree, to both trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS. In 1992 the state of Karnataka passed the Karnataka Devadasi Prohibition of Dedication Act (KDPDA) and called for the rehabilitation of Devadasis, but this law reportedly was not enforced effectively and criminalized the actions of Devadasis. Since Devadasis are by custom required to be sexually available to higher caste men, it reportedly is difficult for them to obtain justice from the legal system if they are raped. The KDPDA does not have a provision for penalizing offenders; however the Department of Women and Child Development formed a team to review the act to provide for such a provision.

Despite the incidents of violence and discrimination during the period covered by this report, relations between various religious groups generally were amicable among the substantial majority of citizens. Efforts at ecumenical understanding brought religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. The annual Sarva Dharma Sammelan (All Religious Convention) and the frequently held Mushairas (Hindi-Urdu poetry sessions) helped improve intercommunity relations.

Prominent secularists of all religions make public efforts to show respect for other religions by celebrating their holidays and attending social events such as weddings. Institutions such as the army consciously forge loyalties that transcend religion. In September 2004, the Army banned religious symbols in all military vehicles to limit the chance they would cause conflict between religious groups. Muslim groups have protested against the mistreatment of Christians by Hindu extremists. Christian clergy and spokespersons for Christian organizations issued public statements condemning anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat, and the Archbishop of Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat, participated in a peace march in 2003.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to promote religious freedom through contact with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The Embassy and Consulates regularly meet with religious leaders and report on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

The U.S. Government supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious and communal tolerance and freedom. Members of the Embassy community celebrate Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals throughout the year with members of the various religious communities. During Ramadan, the Chargé d'Affaires and other embassy officers hosted Iftars to promote better relations with the Muslim community. Members of the embassy community also attended numerous Ramadan celebrations hosted by Muslim contacts. The Embassy also expanded the Urdu and Hindi editions of SPAN magazine, exploring issues such as globalization, conflict resolution, human rights, academic freedom and inclusiveness toward women and minorities.

During the period covered by this report, Embassy and Consulate officials met with important leaders of all significant minority communities. For example, the Calcutta Consulate hosted an Iftar in December for local Muslim contacts and continued to conduct madrassah exchange programs. Embassy officials also continued an active program of outreach and engagement with leaders of the country's Muslim communities.

The Department of State authorized a consular officer to find that a senior state-level official was ineligible for a visa under section 212 (a)(2)(G) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, which makes ineligible any foreign government official who "was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom." In the particular case concerned, the finding led to revocation of the official's business/visitor visa.

The NGO and missionary communities in the country are extremely active on questions of religious freedom, and mission officers meet regularly with local NGOs.

The Ambassador and other senior U.S. officials continued to express regret over the communal violence in Gujarat in 2002, and urged all parties to resolve their differences peacefully. Consulate officers also met in Mumbai with a range of NGO, business, media, and other contacts, including Muslim leaders, to monitor the aftermath of the violence in Gujarat. The Mumbai Consulate arranges Iftars each year and makes outreach efforts through special International Visitor Madrassah programs.

Officials from the Consulate in Chennai were active in assisting missionary Joseph Cooper following Hindu extremists' attack on him in 2003. The Consulate in Chennai also organized roundtables in June 2003 and October 2004 to promote better understanding between the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities. The Chennai Consulate has continued to reach out to the Muslim community. The Consulate provides English instruction to underprivileged Muslim children, donates books to Madrassahs in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Bangalore, and sponsors qualified Muslims for IV programs on "Islamic Life in the U.S." and "Religious Education in the U.S." Consulate Chennai continued its tradition of hosting Iftars.

U.S. officials have continued to engage state officials on the reversal of anti-conversion laws.

MALDIVES

The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion. The Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens be Muslims. Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The law prohibits the practice of any religion other than Islam. The President is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Government regulations are based on Islamic law (Shari'a). Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practice their religion only privately. Visitors must also refrain from encouraging local citizens to practice any other religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and freedom of religion remains severely restricted.

Many citizens regard Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics. They believe that it promotes harmony and national identity.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Maldives is an archipelago consisting of approximately 1,200 coral atolls and islands scattered over 500 miles in the Indian Ocean southwest of India, and its population is approximately 280,000.

The population is an ethnic mixture, consisting predominantly of South Indians, Sinhalese, and Arabs. Several hundred members of an Indian trading community on the capital island of Malé follow the Shi'a branch of Islam; the rest of the population is Sunni. Non-Muslim foreigners, including more than 500,000 tourists annually (predominantly Europeans and Japanese) and approximately 31,000 foreign workers (predominantly Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, and Bangladeshis), are allowed to practice their religions only in private.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion, and the Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that all citizens be Muslims. Muslim holidays are generally national holidays. Foreign residents are allowed to practice their religion only if they do so privately and do not encourage local citizens to participate. Foreigners are not allowed to import any items deemed "contrary to Islam," including alcohol, pork products, or idols for worship. Alcoholic beverages are available to tourists on resort islands, but it remains against the law to offer alcohol to a local citizen. The Government applies laws based on Shari'a. Civil law is subordinate to Shari'a, which is applied in situations not covered by civil law as well as in certain cases such as divorce and adultery.

Islamic instruction is a mandatory part of the school curriculum, and the Government funds the salaries of instructors of Islam. One school uses Arabic as the medium of instruction, and its curriculum focuses primarily on Islam. Many people who seek further religious education obtain it in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, or other neighboring Islamic countries.

Men who wish to act as imams must sit for public exams and present their scores and credentials to the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, chaired by the Chief Justice. The Supreme Council is the body empowered to certify imams. However, if the Supreme Council denies certification, the petitioner can appeal to the Board of Education.

Imams are responsible only for presenting Friday sermons. They may choose to use a set of government-approved sermons on a variety of topics, but they are not legally empowered to write sermons independently. No one, not even an imam, may publicly discuss Islam unless invited to do so by the Government. According to government officials, this rule is in place in order to maintain a moderate Islamic environment rather than a fundamentalist one.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has repeatedly stated that no religion other than Islam should be allowed in the country. The Home Affairs Ministry also announced special programs to safeguard and strengthen religious unity. The Government established the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs to provide guidance on religious matters. The Government also has set standards for individuals who conduct Friday services at mosques so that they have adequate theological qualifications.

By law, the President must be a Sunni Muslim, and under the Constitution, he is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Cabinet ministers also are required to be Sunni. Members of the People's Majlis (Parliament) must be Muslim; however, they are not required to be Sunni. Under the country's Islamic practice, the testimony of two women is required to equal that of one man in matters involving Shari'a such as adultery, finance, and inheritance. In other cases, the testimony of men and women is equal. Shari'a also governs intestate inheritance, granting male heirs twice the share of female heirs. The Constitution provides that an accused person has the right to defend himself "in accordance with Shari'a." The Government registers only clubs and other private associations that do not contravene Islamic or civil law.

The law prohibits public statements that are contrary to Islam.

There are no places of worship for adherents of other religions. The Government prohibits the importation of icons and religious statues, but it generally permits the importation of religious literature, such as Bibles, for personal use. The sale of religious items, such as Christmas cards, is restricted to the resort islands patronized by foreign tourists.

The Government prohibits non-Muslim clergy and missionaries from proselytizing or conducting public worship services. Conversion of a Muslim to another faith is a violation of Shari'a and may result in a loss of the convert's citizenship; however, there are no known cases of converts losing citizenship because of their conversion. Faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are not specifically excluded by law from operating, but according to UN Development Program personnel in the country, the government would have turned away any non-Islamic faith-based groups. When Friends of Maldives, a United Kingdom-based charity, had British school children pack buckets of school materials for children in the Maldives, the Government inspected the packages, found Christmas stories, and removed the stories before the buckets were distributed.

Parents must raise their children to be Muslim because citizens must be Muslim. Foreigners can raise their children to follow any religion as long as they practice only privately in their homes or hotel rooms and do not try to include local citizens in their worship.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The law limits a citizen's right to freedom of expression to protect "the basic tenets of Islam." According to Amnesty International and other sources, in January 2002, four individuals were arrested for distributing extremist Islamist and antigovernment literature in an electronic newsletter. Both the promotion of Islamic extremism and the promotion of other religions are prohibited. In July 2002, after being convicted of the charges, three of the defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment, and the fourth was given a 10-year sentence.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Most citizens regard Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics and believe that it promotes harmony and national identity and helps remove any desire for different groups to break away from the state. The President regularly encourages all citizens to strengthen their religious unity.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government does not maintain an embassy in the Maldives; the U.S. Ambassador in Colombo, Sri Lanka, is also accredited to the Government in Malé. The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

NEPAL

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Constitution describes the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it does not establish Hinduism as the state religion. The Government generally did not interfere with the practice of other religions and religious tolerance is broadly practiced; however, there are some restrictions.

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. Although King Gyanendra dismissed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in February and assumed control of the Government within the context of the ongoing Maoist insurgency, his actions did not specifically affect freedom of religion.

Proselytism is prohibited.

Members of minority religions occasionally report police harassment.

Authorities restricted most public celebrations by the Tibetan community, limiting their locations. In January, the Government closed two unregistered offices in Kathmandu associated with the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader.

The Government claimed it closed the offices because they had not complied with the law requiring the registration of all non-governmental organizations.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Adherents of the country's many religions generally coexist peacefully and respect all places of worship. Those who convert to other religions may face isolated incidents of violence and sometimes are ostracized socially, but generally they do not fear to admit their affiliations in public.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains regular contact with Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, and other religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 54,363 square miles, and its population is approximately 24.8 million. Hindus constitute an estimated 81 percent of the population; Buddhists, 11 percent; Muslims, 4.2 percent; and practitioners of Kirant (an indigenous animist religion) and others, 4 percent, of which 0.45 percent are Christian. Christian denominations are few but growing. Christian leaders estimate the number of Christians at approximately 400,000. Press reports indicate that 170 Christian churches operate in Kathmandu alone. The growth of other religious groups is harder to document because the last census was taken in 2001.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and permits the practice of all religions; however, there are some restrictions. The Constitution describes the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it does not establish Hinduism as the state religion.

For decades dozens of Christian missionary hospitals, welfare organizations, and schools have operated in the country. These organizations have not proselytized and have otherwise operated freely. Missionary schools are among the most respected institutions of secondary education; many members of the governing and business elite graduated from Jesuit high schools. Many foreign Christian organizations have direct ties to churches and sponsor pastors for religious training abroad. After the death of Pope John Paul II, the Government ordered flags flown at half-staff for one day out of respect for the Pope.

Some holy days, most of them Hindu, are recognized as national holidays. These are Mahashivaratri, Buddha Jayanti, Falgun Purnima, Krishna Asthami, Dasain, and Tihar.

Public schools do not teach religion.

The Government has no formal policy on interfaith understanding.

In view of the illegality of proselytizing, there are officially no foreign missionaries.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The law prohibits converting others and proselytizing; these activities are punishable by fines, imprisonment, or, for foreigners, expulsion from the country. However, personal conversion is allowed.

Members of minority religions occasionally complain of police harassment. Some Christian groups are concerned that the ban on proselytizing limits the expression of non-Hindu religious belief. The Government investigates reports of proselytizing. There were no incidents of punishment for conversion or proselytizing during the reporting period. On April 27, police arrested a couple and investigated them for reports of forcibly converting children; the police released them on May 9. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or individuals were free to file charges of proselytizing against individuals or organizations.

Christian groups report that government officials refuse to register any religious organizations whose titles contain the words, "Jesus, Bible, Christian, or Church." These groups note that, unless registered, such organizations cannot own land, important for establishing churches or burial of members. However, by removing the Christian words from their titles, some groups have registered their organizations and practiced their faith. Some Christians bury their dead in Christian cemeteries in Kathmandu and some other areas around the country, and others use cremation. Civil servants can take off religious holidays and celebrate them on private property without government interference.

Tibetan Buddhists have faced various restrictions on their celebrations. Local authorities generally restrict celebration of Tibetan religious festivals to private property. Police in Kathmandu prohibited Tibetans celebrating the New Year from car-

rying pictures of the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, around the Bhouddhanath stupa as part of religious ceremonies. The Government restricted to private places (school grounds or inside monasteries) all of the local Tibetan celebrations (Tibetan New Year, the Dalai Lama's birthday, Democracy Day, and International Human Rights Day/Celebration of the Dalai Lama receiving the Nobel Peace Prize). In January, the Government closed two unregistered offices in Kathmandu associated with the Dalai Lama: the office of the Dalai Lama's representative and the Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office. The welfare office looks after more than 20,000 Tibetan refugees who left their homeland after the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959. The Government claimed it closed the offices because they did not comply with the law requiring the registration of all NGOs, religious or otherwise, and the welfare office was in the process of registering with the government so as to comply with the law. The Government has allowed other organizations and individuals to continue looking after the refugees in the interim.

Muslim religious schools, or madrassahs, but not mosques, must register with local District Administration Offices (part of the Home Ministry) and supply information about their funding sources in order to continue operation; they receive no government funding. Some Muslim leaders criticized the move as discriminatory. However, the registration requirement has not been enforced. Muslims are not restricted from participating in the Hajj, though the government does not subsidize the pilgrimage. As with Christians, Muslim civil servants can take off religious holidays and celebrate them on private property without government interference.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste; however, the caste system strongly influences society. While the Government has stressed that caste-based discrimination is illegal and temple access for "lower castes" has improved in some areas, caste discrimination remains frequently practiced at Hindu temples, which some Hindu priests do not let untouchables enter. Lower castes also experience discrimination in many other areas of life, including education, employment, and marriage. Other religious communities do not practice caste discrimination. Entrance to many Hindu temples is often restricted for persons not of South Asian ethnicity, who are unlikely to be Hindu. The Press and Publications Act prohibits the publication of materials that create animosity among persons of different castes or religions.

On September 1, 2004, after an Iraqi militant group killed 12 Nepalese expatriate workers in Iraq, mob violence in Kathmandu and other areas of the country targeted mosques and Muslim businesses as well as manpower agencies and press houses. Seven persons were killed, four by mob violence because they were or were believed to be Muslim. Immediately following the riots, Nepal's Prime Minister made a nationwide address calling on citizens to eschew communal violence and maintain religious harmony. A government investigation resulted in no arrests, but the Government compensated affected manpower agencies.

Parents are not prevented from teaching their religion of choice to children, who may live a religious life.

There are no restrictions on the selling or possession of religious literature.

There are no laws that apply only to certain religious groups.

Religion-affiliated political parties are restricted to the extent that Article 113.3 of the 1991 Constitution states that the Election Commission shall not register any political organization or party that discriminates for membership against any citizen on the basis of religion, caste, tribe, language, or sex or that has a name, insignia, flag, or objective that is religious or communal or tends to fragment the country.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

During the period covered by this report, Maoist insurgents restricted religious freedom in parts of the country. There were regular reports of Maoists enforcing a "people's calendar" in schools that did not allow for religious holidays. According to one Christian organization, Maoists began demanding the use of church grounds for their indoctrination programs in eastern areas. When the demands were refused, Maoists forced churches to close.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) is a designated terrorist organization under the "Terrorist Exclusion List" of the Immigration and Nationality Act and under Executive Order 13224.

There were scattered reports of Maoist insurgents attacking Hindu temples and harassing Hindu priests during the reporting period.

On May 17, 2004, a group of Maoists abducted a Royal Nepal Army priest from Ramechhap District.

On September 12, 2004, Maoists exploded a bomb and forced the closure of St. Joseph's school in Pokhara. The school's 551 students mostly were from underprivileged ethnic communities.

In September 2004, Maoist threats prompted the temporary closing of 21 churches in Sankhuwasabha District.

On December 29, 2004, Maoists shot dead Arun Budhathoki, Chief of Shiva Shena Nepal, a Hindu religious organization, in Nepalgunj, Banke District.

In May 2005, Narayan Pokharel, president of the Nepal branch of the World Hindu Council, was killed in the district of Rupandehi, approximately 300 kilometers (175 miles) from Kathmandu. Although no one has acknowledged responsibility, police suspect the involvement of Maoist rebels.

In addition to attacking regular schools, Maoists reportedly attacked Christian schools, orphanages, and homes in efforts to forcibly conscript children.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Adherents of the country's many religions generally coexist peacefully and respect all places of worship. Most Hindus respect the many Buddhist shrines located throughout the country; Buddhists accord Hindu shrines the same respect. Buddha's birthplace is an important pilgrimage site, and his birthday is a national holiday. Subsequent to the communal rioting following the September 1 slaying by extremists of 12 Nepalese expatriate workers in Iraq, leaders of multiple faiths organized a rally in Kathmandu and called on their followers to maintain religious harmony.

Some Christian groups report that Hindu extremism has increased in recent years. Of particular concern are the Nepalese affiliates of the India-based Hindu political party Shiv Sena, locally known as Pashupati Sena, Shiv Sena Nepal, and Nepal Shivsena. Government policy does not support Hindu extremism, although some political figures have made public statements critical of Christian missionary activities. Some citizens are wary of proselytizing and conversion by Christians and view the growth of Christianity with concern. There are unconfirmed reports that Maoists suppressed religious observance in areas under their control through intimidation and harassment.

Those who choose to convert to other religions, in particular Hindu citizens who convert to Islam or Christianity, sometimes are ostracized socially. They may face isolated incidents of hostility or discrimination from Hindu extremist groups. Some reportedly have been forced to leave their villages. While this prejudice is not systematic, it can be vehement and occasionally violent. Nevertheless, converts generally are not afraid to admit in public their new religious affiliations.

Although such discrimination is prohibited by the Constitution, the caste system strongly influences society. Societal discrimination against members of lower castes and untouchables remains widespread and persistent. In December 2004, approximately a dozen persons were injured in a scuffle when the management committee of a Hindu temple in Chitwan District tried to stop "low caste" persons from entering the temple. Such incidents occurred despite the Government's efforts to protect the rights of disadvantaged castes. In March 2002, the Government constituted a National Dalit Commission charged with protecting and promoting dalit (formerly called "untouchable") rights and ensuring active participation of the dalit community in the development of the country by uplifting and developing all the dalits. The Commission devises legal and policy arrangements for dalit rights, makes recommendations to implement international documents to which the country is a party, monitors and coordinates NGOs on efforts to uplift dalits, and launches programs on social awareness to end social discrimination and untouchability.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains contact with Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim and other religious groups. The Embassy monitors closely religious freedom and raises the issue with the Government when appropriate. In March, the Embassy sponsored the monk in charge of Sangharam Bhikkhu Buddhist Training Center in Kathmandu for an International Visitor program in the United States entitled Religious Diversity in America.

PAKISTAN

The country is an Islamic republic, and the Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam. The Constitution states that “subject to law, public order and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion;” however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. Islam is the state religion. Freedom of speech is constitutionally “subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam.” The country was created to be a homeland for Muslims, although its founders did not envisage it as an Islamic state.

The Government took some steps to improve the treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report, but serious problems remained. The Government fails to protect the rights of religious minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government’s failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith fostered religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities.

The Ahmadiyya religious minority continued to face legal bars to the practice of its faith. While other minority religious communities generally were able to worship freely, their members often faced governmental discrimination. Members of certain Islamic schools of thought also claimed governmental discrimination. Law enforcement personnel abused religious minorities in custody, leading to deaths in some cases. Security forces and other government agencies did not adequately prevent or address societal abuse against minorities. Specific government policies that discriminate against religious minorities include the use of the “Hudood” Ordinances and the blasphemy laws. The Hudood Ordinances impose elements of Qur’anic law on both Muslims and non-Muslims. The blasphemy laws provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur’an; and 10 years’ imprisonment for insulting the religious feelings of any citizen. Both the Hudood Ordinances and the blasphemy laws have been abused, in that they are often used against persons to settle personal scores. The provincial government in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with the conservative Islamic vision of its supporters. Despite the Islamic Ideology Council’s rejection of the Hisba bill and the concerns of the federal government, the opposition and human rights groups, the NWFP passed the bill shortly after the end of the reporting period. The law currently is in abeyance, as its constitutionality is under review by the Supreme Court.

However, during the reporting period, the Government maintained its public calls for religious tolerance, pressured Islamic clergy to issue an injunction on sectarian violence and the killing of non-Muslims, revised implementation of the blasphemy law to curb abuses, maintained its ban on and actively attempted to curb the activities of sectarian and terrorist organizations, and proceeded with reform of the public education curriculum designed to end the teaching of religious intolerance.

Relations between religious communities were tense. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was widespread and societal violence against such groups occurred. Societal actors, including terrorist and extremist groups and individuals, targeted religious congregations. More than 125 deaths accrued from sectarian violence, including by the terrorist group Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, during the period covered by this report. Large numbers of victims came from both Sunni and Shi’a sects. The Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), a coalition of Islamist political parties, continued in its political rhetoric to call for the increased Islamization of the government and society. The MMA leads the opposition in the National Assembly, holds a majority in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Provincial Assembly, and is part of the ruling coalition in Balochistan.

However, some members of the MMA made efforts to eliminate its rhetoric against Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, and Parsis, and under government pressure, many of its leaders joined various interfaith efforts to promote religious tolerance. Religious leaders, representing the country’s six major Shi’a and Sunni groups, issued a religious injunction in May banning sectarian violence and the killing of non-Muslims. Clergy from all Islamic schools of thought and many minority faith communities joined together in September 2004 to form the World Council on Religions, an interfaith group designed to promote dialogue and tolerance. However, anti-Ahmadi and anti-Semitic rhetoric continued unabated, and a growing movement against Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan emanated from some constituencies in the coalition. Sectarian violence and discrimination continued despite contrary calls from the government, Islamic religious leaders, and some parts of the MMA.

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

report, Embassy officials closely monitored the treatment of religious minorities and took a number of steps to improve their treatment. As part of its education reform initiative, the U.S. continued to help the Education Ministry revise its curriculum, including eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance. Embassy officials remained engaged with all parties involved in madrassah reform to encourage similar changes. Embassy officials pressed parliamentarians and the Government to revise blasphemy laws and the Hudood Ordinances to minimize abuses and raised concerns with government officials and religious leaders over growing rhetoric against Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan and sectarian strife in the Northern Areas. The Embassy also expanded contacts with all religious groups to promote moderation, to end sectarian strife and religiously motivated violence, and to support efforts at interfaith dialogue.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 310,527 square miles, and its population is approximately 154 million. Official figures on religious demography—based on the most recent census, taken in 1998—deem approximately 96 percent of the population or 148.8 million people to be Muslim, 2.02 percent or 2.44 million people to be Hindu, 1.69 percent or 2.09 million to be Christian, and 0.35 percent or 539,000 to be “other,” including Ahmadi.

The majority of Muslims in the country are Sunni. Ten percent or approximately 14.9 million are Shi'a. The Shi'a claim these figures are inaccurate and that at least 20 percent of the Muslim population are Shi'a followers split between the Qom (approximately 40 percent) and Najaf (approximately 60 percent) schools of thought. Government estimates on Shi'a count approximately 750,000 Ismailis, most of whom are spiritual followers of the Aga Khan. An estimated 80,000 belong to the Bohra or other smaller schools of thought. Shi'a are found nationwide but have population concentrations in Karachi, Gilgit, and parts of Balochistan. Ismailis are found principally in Hunza, Karachi, and Baltistan. The majority Sunni Muslim community is divided into three main schools of thought (Brailvi, Deobandi, and Ahl-e-Hadith) and a socio-political movement, the Jamaat Islami (JI), which has its own theology, schools, and mosques. Ahl-e-Hadith adherents comprise, at most, 5 percent of Muslims, and are concentrated in Punjab. No reliable figures on JI adherents exist, as its membership always claims adherence to another school. Its adherents, however, are generally found in urban centers. Brailvi and Deobandi leaders both claim that their schools comprise up to 80 percent of the overall Muslim population. Most disinterested observers believe that the Brailvi remain the largest school, around 60 percent of all Muslims, with the Deobandi at around 20 percent, but growing. The Brailvi are the dominant majority in Sindh and Punjab. Deobandi are generally found in the Pashtun belt from northern Punjab, across the NWFP, and into northern Balochistan, although there are increasing numbers in Karachi and the Seraiki areas of Punjab.

Several smaller self-described Muslim groups exist, most notably approximately 200,000 Zikris found in Gwadar, Balochistan. Most Sunnis consider Zikris to be non-Muslims due to their unique religious ceremonies, including a separate Hajj held in Turbat, Balochistan. Ahmadis have been officially declared non-Muslim due to an assertion that Muhammed may not be the last prophet. Ahmadis have boycotted the census since 1974, rendering official numbers inaccurate. They claim at least 2 million adherents centered on their spiritual town of Chenab Nagar, Punjab (referred to as Rabwah by Ahmadis). In 1998, the Punjab Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution to change the name to Chenab Nagar against the wishes of the Ahmadi community.

Non-Muslims are officially 4 percent of the population, although their leaders claim the actual figure is approximately 10 percent. Christians, officially 1.69 percent of the population or 2.09 million, claim actually to have 4 million members, 90 percent of whom live in Punjab. The largest Christian denomination is the umbrella Protestant Church of Pakistan, a member of the Anglican Communion. Catholics are the second-largest group, and the remainder belong to various evangelical denominations. The Roman Catholic diocese of Karachi estimates that 120,000 Catholics live in Karachi, 40,000 in the rest of Sindh, and 5,000 in Quetta, Balochistan. A few tribal Hindus of the lower castes from interior Sindh have converted to Christianity. Hindus are officially 2.02 percent of the population with 2.44 million adherents. Their leaders claim an actual membership of around 4 million. Most Hindus live in Sindh, where they comprise approximately 8 percent of the population. Parsis, Sikhs, and Buddhists each have approximately 20,000 adherents, while the Baha'i claim 30,000. The tiny but influential Parsi community is concentrated in

Karachi. Some tribes in Balochistan and NWFP practice traditional animist religions.

Less than 0.5 percent of the population is silent on religion or claims not to adhere to a particular religion. Social pressure is such that few people would claim not to be affiliated with any religion.

No data are available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals. Religion often plays an important part in daily life. Most Muslims offer prayers on Friday, Islam's holy day. Many also pray at least once during the five prayer times each day. During the month of Ramadan, even many less observant Muslims fast and attend services. Approximately 70 percent of English-speaking Roman Catholics worship regularly; a much lower percentage of Urdu speakers do so.

Many varieties of Hinduism are practiced. Hindu shrines and temples are scattered throughout the country, although most of them are now used as residences. Attendance at religious services is much greater during Hindu festivals, such as Divali and Holi.

The Sikh community regularly holds ceremonial gatherings at sacred places in Punjab. Prominent places of Sikh pilgrimage include Nanakana Sahib (where the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469), Hasan Abdal (a shrine where an imprint of his hand is kept), and Kartar Poora (also known as Daira Baba Nanak Sahib) in Narowal District (where Guru Nanak is buried).

Parsis, who practice the Zoroastrian religion, have no regularly scheduled congregational services, except during a 10-day religious festival in August called Naurooz ("new day"). All Parsis are expected to attend these services; most reportedly do. During the rest of the year, individuals offer prayers at Parsi temples.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country. The largest Christian mission group engages in Bible translation for the Church of Pakistan. An Anglican missionary group fields several missionaries to assist the Church of Pakistan in administrative and educational work. Roman Catholic missionaries, mostly Franciscan, work with persons with disabilities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to profess and practice their religions freely; however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion, particularly on the Ahmadis. Due to Ahmadis' refusal to accept that Muhammed was the final prophet of Islam, a 1974 Constitutional amendment declares this self-described Islamic community to be non-Muslim. A series of subsequent changes to the Penal Code prevent the Ahmadis from practicing and propagating their faith. The Government has blocked similar movements to restrict both Zikris and Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan. Other religious communities were generally free to observe their religious obligations; however, religious minorities are, in some places, legally restricted from public display of certain religious images and, due to discriminatory legislation, are often afraid to profess their religion freely.

Freedom of speech is subject to reasonable restrictions in the interests of the "glory of Islam." Under the country's "blasphemy laws," any speech or action that denigrates Islam or its prophets is punishable by death. In addition, any speech or conduct that injures another's religious feelings is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment. These laws were rarely enforced, and the cases rarely brought to the legal system, when the injury was to a member of a minority religious community. Pressure from societal, religious, or political leaders routinely prevented courts from protecting minority rights. These same pressures forced justices to take strong action against any perceived offense to Sunni Islamic orthodoxy. Discrimination against religious minorities was rarely placed before the judiciary. Courts would be unlikely to act objectively in such cases. Resolving cases is very slow; there is generally a long period between filing the case and the first court appearance. Lower courts are frequently intimidated, delay decisions, and refuse bail for fear of reprisal from extremist elements. Bail in blasphemy cases is almost always denied by original trial courts on the logic that since defendants are facing the death penalty, they are likely to flee. Defendants can appeal the denial of bail (and many do), but bail rarely is granted by the High Court or the Supreme Court in advance of the trial. There were 54 blasphemy cases filed during the reporting period, 11 more than the previous period. According to figures compiled by the National Commission for Justice and Peace, between 1986 and 2004, 634 people were accused of blasphemy: 309 Muslims, 236 Ahmadis, 81 Christians, and 8 Hindus.

The country's Penal Code ostensibly incorporates a number of Islamic law (Shari'a) provisions, applying to all that allow victims to carry out physical retribu-

tion. The judicial system encompasses several different court systems with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions, which reflect differences in civil, criminal, and Islamic jurisprudence. The federal Shari'a court and the Shari'a bench of the Supreme Court serve as appellate courts for certain convictions in criminal court under the Hudood Ordinances, and judges and attorneys in these courts must be Muslims. The federal Shari'a court also may overturn any legislation judged to be inconsistent with the tenets of Islam. However, in March, the Supreme Court Chief Justice, issuing a stay in the Mukhtaran Bibi rape case, ruled that the Federal Shariat Court had no jurisdiction to review a decision by a provincial high court even if the Shariat Court should have had initial appellate jurisdiction, marking a blow to the power of the Shariat appellate benches. Approximately 1,500 to 2,000 persons were imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinances as of the end of the reporting period.

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. The President and Prime Minister must be Muslims, and all senior officials are required to swear an oath to preserve the country's "Islamic ideology." State funding was provided for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain religious properties belonging to minority communities that were abandoned during partition. Minority communities claim the Government does not spend adequate funds on their protection and upkeep. The Government collected a 2.5 percent tax on all Sunni Muslims, which was distributed to Sunni mosques and charities. No similar service was provided for other religions.

Sunni Muslims appeared to receive favorable consideration in government hiring and advancement. All those wishing to obtain government identification documents as Muslims have to declare an oath on belief in the finality of the Prophethood, a provision designed to discriminate against Ahmadis. Initial voter registration no longer requires such an oath, but the Election Commission claimed that any Muslim registrant, whose religion was challenged by the public, would have to take the oath. As a result, Ahmadis continued to boycott elections.

Several Muslim religious holidays are considered national holidays, including Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Azha, Ashura (the 9th and 10th days of the month of Muharram) and the Prophet Muhammed's birthday. Most businesses have limited hours during the month of Ramadan. Non-Muslim holidays are not observed, although Mohammad Ali Jinnah's birthday is celebrated as a holiday on Christmas Day.

The Constitution safeguards "educational institutions with respect to religion." No student can be forced to receive religious instruction or to participate in religious worship other than his or her own. The denial of religious instruction for students of any religious community or denomination is also prohibited.

"Islamiyyat" (Islamic studies) is compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other faiths legally are not required to study Islam, they were not provided with parallel studies in their own religions. In some schools, non-Muslim students could study "Akhlaqiyyat," or Ethics. In practice, teachers induced many non-Muslim students to complete Islamic studies.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution solely on the basis of religion. Government officials state that the only factors affecting admission to governmental educational institutions are students' grades and home provinces. However, students must declare their religion on application forms. Muslim students must declare in writing that they believe in the unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammed, a measure designed to single out Ahmadis. Non-Muslims must have their religion verified by the head of their local religious community.

Parents were free to send children to religious schools, at their expense, and many did.

Islamic religious schools, known as madrassahs, are regulated by the Government. In accordance with the 2002 Madrassah Registration Ordinance, all madrassahs were required to register, cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their government. Out of an estimated 13,000 to 15,000 madrassahs, only a few hundred are not registered with one of the five independent madrassah boards and/or directly with the Government. No unregistered madrassahs have been shut down. The Government and the independent madrassah boards have agreed to a phased introduction of modern subjects, including math, English, and science at all madrassahs. While the boards have required their affiliated madrassahs to move forward, disbursement of promised government funding to support the process has been slow.

The MMA-led provincial government in NWFP continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with the conservative Islamic vision of its supporters. If implemented, many of these initiatives would impose Islamic law on all citizens. Ex-

isting laws include: anti-obscenity measures, under which advertising has been torn down and stores have been fined for selling certain western recordings ; a complete ban on alcohol; a requirement for civil servants to pray five times daily, which has never been enforced; bans on public displays of women's photos and dancing, also not enforced; and a Shari'a bill that mirrored one already in place at the federal level since 1991 and which requires that all existing legislation, including in the education and financial sectors, be reviewed in light of Shari'a. The Islamic Ideology Council struck down the original MMA-sponsored provincial Hisba bill, under which a provincial authority is appointed and empowered to create, implement and enforce regulations to promote Islamic laws and values.

The Government, at its most senior levels, continued to call for interfaith dialogue and sectarian harmony as part of its program to promote enlightened moderation. It was instrumental in organizing the inaugural meeting of the World Council of Religions, an interfaith body of clerics and religious scholars devoted to interfaith dialogue. The President addressed the opening meeting in September 2004, and the Religious Affairs Ministry and provincial governments remained active in the group's activities. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the Council on Islamic Ideology, a constitutionally mandated government body, continued to sponsor interfaith and inter-sectarian workshops and meetings. The Religious Affairs Ministry played an active role in negotiating the inter-sectarian injunction against sectarian violence and the killing of non-Muslims in the country issued in May 2005.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government discourages and severely restricts public practice of the Ahmadiyya faith both by law and in practice. A 1974 constitutional amendment declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims because they do not accept Muhammed as the last prophet of Islam. However, Ahmadis consider themselves to be Muslims and observe Islamic practices. In 1984, the Government added to the Penal Code Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi law." Used by the government and anti-Ahmadi religious groups to target and harass Ahmadis, the section prohibits Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims or posing as Muslims, from referring to their faith as Islam, from preaching or propagating their faith, from inviting others to accept the Ahmadi faith; and from insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The vague wording of the provision that forbids Ahmadis from "directly or indirectly" posing as Muslims has enabled mainstream Muslim religious leaders to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting form and for naming their children Muhammed. The constitutionality of Section 298(c) was upheld in a split-decision Supreme Court case in 1996. The punishment for violation of the section is imprisonment for up to 3 years and a fine. An Ahmadiyya Muslim community report claimed that in 2004, 51 Ahmadis faced criminal charges under religious laws or because of their faith: 4 under the blasphemy laws, 19 under Ahmadi-specific laws, 1 under a religious law, and 27 under other laws but motivated by their Ahmadi faith.

The Government gave tacit endorsement to Islamic clerics' campaigns against the perceived dangers of the Ahmadiyya faith by permitting the annual conference on the finality of the prophethood. Ahmadis are prohibited from holding any public conferences or gatherings, and since 1983 they have been denied permission to hold their annual conference. Ahmadis are banned from preaching. The Government prohibits Ahmadi travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj or other religious pilgrimages; since July 2003, anyone wanting to travel on the Hajj must denounce the founder of the Ahmadiyya faith as a "cunning person and an imposter" on a printed oath that is part of the government registration process, thereby effectively preventing Ahmadis from fulfilling this tenant of the Islamic faith. Additionally, Ahmadi publications are banned from public sale; however, Ahmadis publish religious literature in large quantities for a limited circulation.

The Constitution provides for the "freedom to manage religious institutions." In principle, the Government does not restrict organized religions from establishing places of worship and training members of the clergy. However, in practice Ahmadis suffer from restrictions on this right. According to press reports, the authorities continued to conduct surveillance on the Ahmadis and their institutions. Several Ahmadi mosques reportedly have been closed; others reportedly have been desecrated or had their construction stopped. For example, in Taltay Aali, Gujranwala District, the local government barred the Ahmadi community from completing construction following Muslim attacks on the site. The Government does not prohibit, restrict, or punish parents for raising children in accordance with religious teachings and practices of their choice, nor does it take steps to prevent parents from teaching their children religion in the privacy of the home.

The Constitution allows reasonable restrictions on freedom of speech for the “glory of Islam.” The Penal Code includes specific provisions that restrict speech and action against other religions. These “blasphemy laws,” as they are collectively known, provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur’an; and 10 years’ imprisonment for insulting another’s religious feelings. They were often used to harass and intimidate liberal Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities. They were also used to settle personal scores and business rivalries. While no accused have been executed under this law, the accused often spend years in prison. Blasphemy suspects were rarely granted bail and were often convicted by trial courts following threats to judges by extremists. Inmates and security forces have killed the accused in custody, and mobs have killed them after acquittal.

To end the filing of frivolous charges, the Government enacted a law in January 2005 that requires senior police officials to investigate any blasphemy charges before a complaint is filed. Human rights organizations had called for such changes since 2000. Initial indications on the law’s impact were positive. Between January 1 and June 30, 2005, 17 blasphemy cases were registered. By contrast, during the last 6 months of 2004, a total of 37 cases were registered—15 against Muslims, 21 against Ahmadis, and 1 against a Christian—and only 9 cases since the revised legislation passed the National Assembly in October 2004. However, there were 54 blasphemy cases filed during the entire reporting period, 11 more than during the previous period. According to figures compiled by the National Commission for Justice and Peace, between 1986 and 2004, 634 people were accused of blasphemy: 309 Muslims, 236 Ahmadis, 81 Christians, and 8 Hindus.

There is no law against apostasy; however, societal pressure against conversion from Islam was so strong that any conversion almost certainly would take place in secret.

Civil marriages do not exist; marriages are performed and registered according to one’s religion. The marriages of Hindu or Christian men remain legal upon conversion to Islam but are considered dissolved for marriages of Hindu or Christian women or of other non-Muslims that were performed under the rites of the previous religion. Children born to Hindu or Christian women who do not separate from their husbands, yet convert to Islam after marriage, are considered illegitimate unless their husbands also convert. Children of non-Muslim men who convert are not considered illegitimate. Under Islamic law, a Muslim man can marry a woman of the Book (Jews or Christians) but cannot marry a Hindu woman. Muslim women may only marry Muslim men.

There are no legal requirements for an individual to practice or affiliate nominally with a religion. The Government does not penalize or legally discriminate against those not affiliated with any religion. In practice, societal pressure is such that very few people would admit to not belonging to a religion. Doing so would likely lead to significant discrimination. Religious belief or specific adherence to a religion was not required for membership in the ruling party or the moderate opposition parties, which did not exclude members of any religion. The MMA had non-Muslim Members of Parliament. However, in practice, each of its constituent parties generally restricted membership to its sectarian adherents. It would be virtually impossible for Ahmadis or Jews to join the MMA or its constituent parties. In practice, neither Ismailis nor Zikris could join the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazlur Rehman, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Sami ul-Haq, or JI. Shi’a claimed they were not welcome in JI, although JI leadership denied the assertion. The political arm of the sectarian extremist group Sunni Tehrik accepted only Brailvi members.

The Government does not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular faith, religious belief, or interpretation of religious doctrine. The Government monitored the activities of various Islamist parties and affiliated clergy due to prior links to terrorist and extremist organizations. Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith leaders claimed the Government harassed their members due to political stances. Brailvis and Ahl-e-Hadiths claimed the Government, hoping to appease political extremists, favored the Deobandis and JI for jobs in state mosques, Islamic studies faculties at state schools, and government jobs with religious responsibilities. The Government denied such charges.

Missionaries are allowed to operate in the country, and proselytizing, except by Ahmadis, is permitted as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge that they are not Muslim. However, all missionaries are required to have specific visas, valid from 2 to 5 years and allowing only one entry into the country per year. Only “replacement” visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems were frequent.

Under the Anti-Terrorist Act, any action, including speech, intended to stir up religious hatred is punishable by up to 7 years of rigorous imprisonment. Under the act, bail is not to be granted if the judge has reasonable grounds to believe that the accused is guilty; however, the law is applied selectively.

The Government does not restrict religious publishing in general; however, Ahmadi religious literature is banned. Publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets or insults to another's religion is prohibited. Insults against minority religions were rarely prosecuted. For example, Ameer Hamza, a leader of the banned terrorist group Lashkar-e-Tayyibba, was not prosecuted for writing a highly derogatory book about Hinduism in 1999 called "Hindu Ki Haqeeqat" ("Reality of (a) Hindu"). Christian scriptures and books are readily available, but Christians have reported concerns about pressure leading to self-censorship. Ahmadis charge that they suffer from restrictions on their press. In July 2003, Tanvir Ahmed Asif and Abdul Qadir were charged with blasphemy, as well as violating the anti-Ahmadi law, for writing a book called "Religious Dalits of Pakistan," which explained the situation of Ahmadis around the country.

Publication of the Qur'an must include the original Arabic text. In May 2005, the Government confiscated Urdu translations of the Qur'an published in Canada that did not include the original Arabic. In November 2004, the Peshawar High Court overturned the blasphemy conviction of former Frontier Post copy editor Munawar Mohsin. Mohsin had published a letter to the editor in 2001 that was critical of the Prophet Muhammed. Foreign books must pass government censors before being reprinted. Books and magazines may be imported freely but are subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content. An Islamabad magistrate ordered the November 22, 2004, issue of Newsweek destroyed due to objectionable photos accompanying an article on the murder of Dutch national Theo Van Gogh that supposedly desecrated the Qu'ran.

Local and district governments restrict the distribution and display of certain religious images, such as the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ. Such images were readily available in other parts of the country.

The Government funded and facilitated Hajj travel but had no similar program for pilgrimages by religious minorities. In addition to prohibiting Ahmadi travel for the Hajj, the Government de facto prevented Baha'is from traveling to their spiritual center in Israel due to nonrecognition of that country.

The Government designates religion on passports and national identity documents. In November 2004, the Government began issuing new machine readable passports without the religion column. A conservative backlash and Islamist party protests led the Government to reverse course and restore the column in March 2005. Those wishing to be listed as a Muslim on such documents had to swear a belief in the finality of the Prophethood and denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslims.

Links with coreligionists in other countries were maintained relatively easily. The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan reported no difficulties. Ismailis communicated regularly with their headquarters; their officials, including Prince Karim Aga Khan, visited the country. Under reciprocal visa arrangements, Indian Hindu and Sikh leaders and groups traveled frequently to the country.

The Constitution requires that the country's President and Prime Minister must be Muslims. All senior officials, including parliamentarians, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity. Government employees are not prohibited from displaying or practicing any elements of their faith. In NWFP, provincial regulations require all civil servants to pray five times daily; however, this was not enforced. Sunni Muslims appeared to receive favorable consideration in government hiring and advancement.

Religious minorities, including Shi'a, contended that the Government persistently discriminated against members of their communities in hiring for the civil service and in admissions to government institutions of higher learning. Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadis, who contend that a "glass ceiling" prevents them from being promoted to senior positions and that certain government departments have refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadis. All those wishing to obtain government identification documents as Muslims have to declare an oath on belief in the finality of the Prophethood, a provision designed to discriminate against Ahmadis. Religious minorities claimed the Government failed to provide their areas with equal public services and criticized the Religious Affairs Ministry for failing to take adequate steps to improve their socioeconomic development. The Ministry rejected these charges, claiming it spent 30 percent of its annual budget on minorities. Ahl-e-Hadith and Brailvi leaders contended that their groups were underrepresented in the hiring of clergy for government mosques and on the Islamic faculties of govern-

ment colleges. They charged that members of JI dominated both the Religious Affairs Ministry and the Islamiyyat wing of the Education Ministry. Ahl-e-Hadith complained of under-representation on government-sponsored religious boards such as the Zakat and Ush'r Council.

Ahmadis continued to contend that they were denied voting rights through requirements that they register as non-Muslims. Members of the public can challenge any Muslim on the voter roles to take an oath swearing to the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammed and denouncing the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement. For this reason, Ahmadis have refused to register. There are reserved seats for minority members in both the National and Provincial Assemblies. Such seats are allocated to the political parties on a proportional basis determined by their overall representation in the Assembly.

Members of minority religions volunteered for military service in small numbers, and there are no official obstacles to their advancement. However, in practice non-Muslims rarely, if ever, rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to politically sensitive positions. A chaplaincy corps provided services for Muslim soldiers, but no similar services were available for religious minorities.

The public school curriculum was Islamized during the 1980s. This included the adoption of a number of textbooks that included derogatory remarks against minority religions, particularly Hindus and Jews, and the generalized teaching of religious intolerance as acceptable. This curriculum continued to undergo a major revision to eliminate such teachings and to remove Islamic teaching from secular subjects. The Education Ministry cooperated with international donors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in this multi-year effort and professed its intention to proceed despite objections from conservative religious elements. Students were free to practice their faith. Many Ahmadis and Christians reported discrimination in applying to government educational institutions due to their religious affiliation. Christians and Ahmadis reportedly have been denied access to medical schools, and societal discrimination against Ahmadis persists at many universities.

The Government nationalized all church schools and colleges in Punjab and Sindh in 1972. The Government of Sindh oversaw a piecemeal denationalization program from 1985 to 1995, and the Government of Punjab began a similar program in 1996. In 2001, the federal Government and the courts ordered the provincial governments to move forward with a complete denationalization process. Teachers' unions strongly objected, fearing for their job security, and have attempted to tie up denationalization in the court system. The 2003 denationalization of Forman Christian College, arguably the most prominent Christian-founded educational institution in the country, and its successful December 2003 handover to its original owners, the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), helped remove the legal hurdles. In May, the Sindh Government announced its intention to proceed with the handover of St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's colleges to the Catholic Board of Education. The cases of Gordon College in Rawalpindi and Murray College in Sialkot (both PCUSA) remained unresolved.

Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority faiths. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, which is mandated to safeguard religious freedom, has on its masthead a Qur'anic verse: "Islam is the only religion acceptable to God." The Ministry claims it spends 30 percent of its annual budget to assist indigent minorities, repair minority places of worship, set up minority-run small development schemes, and celebrate minority festivals. However, religious minorities question these figures, observing that localities and villages housing minority citizens go without basic civic amenities.

All religious groups experienced bureaucratic delays and requests for bribes when attempting to build houses of worship or to obtain land. These were similar to what nonreligious groups faced. Ahmadis were prevented from building houses of worship. For example, in Tatlay Aali, Gujranwala District, the Ahmadi community was barred from completing construction, following attacks on the site by local Muslims. Sunni Muslim groups built mosques and shrines without government permission and at times in violation of zoning ordinances.

The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for the upkeep of religious property abandoned during partition. Disputes with minority communities over the property and its upkeep may be reviewed by civil courts. While the Government has funded the upkeep and repair of some properties, minority communities continue to charge that its efforts in many cases are inadequate.

Criminal law allows offenders to offer monetary restitution to victims and allows victims to carry out physical retribution rather than seek punishment through the court system. This supposedly Islamic provision applied to all. Minorities claimed that minority offenders faced far higher, and minority victims received far lower, amounts of monetary restitution than did Muslims.

Also supposedly based on Islamic law, a fact much in dispute, the Hudood Ordinances criminalize rape, extramarital sex, property crimes, alcohol, and gambling. They apply equally to Muslims and non-Muslims. Hudood violations can be tried on either Qur'anic or secular standards of evidence. If Qur'anic standards are used, Muslim and non-Muslim and male and female testimony carries different weight, and harsh Qur'anic punishments can be applied. No successful cases have been brought under this standard. Cases have been successfully prosecuted under secular standards, in which testimony has equal weight, and jail terms and fines have been applied. Women were often spuriously charged with extramarital sex under this law and forced to remain in detention for long periods awaiting trial. To address this issue, the Government adopted new legislation in January 2005, requiring a court order prior to detention of women on such Hudood charges. Human rights activists charged that this change was insufficient and continued to campaign for the repeal of the Hudood Ordinances.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Police torture and mistreatment of those in custody remained a serious and common problem throughout the country and at times resulted in extrajudicial killings. It was usually impossible to ascertain whether religion was a factor in cases in which religious minorities were victims; however, both Christian and Ahmadi communities claimed their members were more likely to be abused. Minority communities charged that police frequently failed to take adequate steps to arrest and prosecute those responsible for crimes against their members. Prison conditions, except those for wealthy or influential prisoners, were extremely poor. Non-Muslim prisoners generally were accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates.

The policeman charged in the May 2004 death of Samuel Masih, a Christian who was charged under the blasphemy laws and who died after police torture, remained in detention pending trial.

On July 26, 2004, police illegally detained Hindu agricultural laborer Manu Kohli in Dadu District and subjected him to severe beatings and other forms of torture before releasing him. The two officers involved were charged with assault.

On August 19, 2004, Nasir Mukhtar, a Christian, died of police torture in Sheikhpura. Mukhtar had been arrested on August 16 on charges of theft. According to his father, Mukhtar had befriended Muslim youths who invited him to their home and then framed him with theft. Following severe police beatings during interrogation, police admitted Mukhtar to the Civil Hospital where he died. When local Christians staged a protest over the death, police used baton charges and tear gas to disperse them. Police charged 20 Christians with offenses related to the protests. The police officers involved in Mukhtar's death were charged with murder, but none were arrested.

On November 3, 2004, unidentified persons kidnapped Samuel Sethi, an 8-year-old Christian. His family paid the abductors the demanded ransom, but the abductors killed Sethi. Police recovered Sethi's corpse and registered a case; however, they refused to arrest those accused by neighbors. Sethi's family charged that the accused bribed police to remain free. After numerous failed appeals for justice, the family emigrated from the country.

On February 8, 2005, three Muslim men kidnapped 13-year old Fozia Zafar, a Christian, in Alipur Chattah. Despite eyewitness accounts and confessions of two of those involved, police refused to register a complaint. Fozia's father, Zafar Masih, went to the District Police Officer, who forced local officers to record the charges and detain the two suspects. Since the complaint, Masih has been dismissed from his local government job, and local Muslims have pressured him to drop the complaint. Fozia and her third kidnapper remained at large.

The Government was not responsible for disappearances based on a person's religion.

There were no reports of security forces engaging in rape or mutilation based on religion.

The blasphemy laws were routinely used to harass religious minorities and liberal Muslims and to settle personal scores or business rivalries. Individuals were detained and convicted on spurious charges and often spent years in jail before acquittal, generally at the appellate level. Unlike in previous reporting periods, there were no reports of police or inmates killing those accused of blasphemy in custody; however, mobs occasionally attacked and killed the accused prior to their arrest. Religious extremists continued to threaten to kill all those acquitted of blasphemy charges. High-profile accused often went into hiding or emigrated after acquittal. In January 2005, in an effort to stem abuse, new legislation entered into force requiring senior police officials to investigate all blasphemy accusations prior to the filing

of charges. At the end of the reporting period, 22 remained in detention awaiting trial on blasphemy charges, and 9 were in prison following conviction.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the case against Tariq Butt, a member of the banned Muslim extremist group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and a prisoner who in 2002 killed a Sufi Muslim convicted of blasphemy, was still pending.

There were no developments during the reporting period in the case of either Pervez Masih or Ranjha Masih, who remained in prison on blasphemy charges.

On July 27, 2004, a Muslim woman publicly accused 16-year-old Christian Salaf Tasneem Dean of Wah Cantt of throwing a copy of the Qur'an into a local dump after Dean's 11-year-old daughter had accidentally thrown her father's antique copy of the Qur'an in the garbage. The woman had a history of strained relations with Dean's family. A Muslim mob threatened to burn down the Dean family residence and tried to kill Tasneem. Local elders and police intervened and arrested the girl and her father. Police eventually released them both following negotiations between local Muslim and Christian leaders, but the family moved to a new location for its safety.

In October 2004, police charged Mohammad Ali, the Muslim owner of the Yarmook Paper Mill in Kasar, with desecrating the Qur'an. The charges followed protests in which students from a local college claimed the mill was recycling copies of the Qur'an to manufacture cardboard. The accused claimed business rivals organized the protests.

On November 29, 2004, the District Court of Faisalabad convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to life in prison Muhammad Iqbal, an Ahmadi from Chak, Faisalabad District. Iqbal, who converted to the Ahmadiyya community as a young man, had recently returned to his home village. He angered the local Muslim religious leader when he refused to abandon the Ahmadiyya faith on March 23, 2004. The leader claimed that Iqbal, during an argument in the local mosque, referred to Muhammed as a false prophet. Ahmadi leaders called this charge pure fabrication.

In December 2004, police charged Shahdat Ali, an Ahmadi, with setting fire to the Qur'an in Uncha Mangat, Hafizbad district. The accused was burning trash. Local children caught some burned papers and took them to a local cleric who had a history of preaching against the local Ahmadi community. The cleric alleged that the burned pages were from the Qur'an. Ali claimed they were simply old newspapers. At the cleric's insistence, police registered a case. Police arrested the accused and two Ahmadi accomplices.

On December 17, 2004, the trial court acquitted Anwar Masih, a Christian, of blasphemy charges originally filed in November 2003. Following the acquittal, members of the extremist group Lashkar-i-Mujahideen vowed to kill him. Masih remained in hiding.

On April 20, a mob in Spin Khak, Nowshera District, shot and killed Ashiq Nabi after his uncle filed blasphemy charges against him. Nabi allegedly desecrated a copy of the Qur'an during an argument with his wife. Before police could arrest him on the charges, Nabi fled the village. After a local Islamic religious leader issued an edict declaring Nabi an infidel whose punishment should be death, a 400-member mob trapped Nabi in a tree and shot him. Police told reporters that they were working to identify the religious leader who issued the edict and would arrest him.

In addition to experiencing prosecution under the blasphemy laws, Ahmadis were often charged, detained, and convicted under the so-called anti-Ahmadi laws. According to Ahmadi leaders, 39 remained in detention on charges under these sections of the law, while 11 were serving convictions. Ahmadi leaders also claimed that the Government used regular sections of the Penal Code against their members for religious reasons. They claimed nine members were in detention on such charges, but none were serving convictions.

On July 22, 2004, a Muslim mob attacked an Ahmadi youth Ghulam Ahmad Tahir following an anti-Ahmadi conference. Tahir fled for his own safety. The crowd charged that he threw stones at them, injuring a Muslim, and fired a pistol. Ahmadis disputed this account of events and asked for a medical report. Although one was never produced, police charged Tahir with assault.

On August 9, 2004, police charged Muhammad Ehsan, an Ahmadi, with trespassing and weapon possession in Chenab Nagar. Ehsan, who suffered from severe mental problems, was accused of climbing the roof of a mosque with a knife and Ahmadiyya literature. Despite evidence of his illness, police arrested Ehsan. Ahmadis denied that he was in possession of literature during the incident and claimed the arrest was simply on religious grounds.

In November 2004, police charged Zulfiqar Goraya, an Ahmadi, with violating the anti-Ahmadi laws by posing as a Muslim. Goraya had sent wedding cards that used the icon number 786, which stands for a popular Qur'anic verse, and that had the Asslam-o-Alikam (the Islamic greeting) and Inshallah (God willing) printed on them.

The Government did not impose onerous financial penalties due to religion.

The Government did not abuse converts to minority religions. Converts to the Ahmadiyya community were often accused of blasphemy, violations of the anti-Ahmadi laws, or other crimes. The Government arrested and prosecuted such individuals. Conversion to other minority religions generally took place in secret to avoid a societal backlash.

Conservative Islamists (generally Deobandis or JI) claimed the Government unjustly searched their homes, schools, and mosques as part of its continued crackdown on extremist and terrorist groups. The Government denied such allegations, noting the complainants all had previous ties to banned groups, making them reasonable targets.

Minority communities charged the Government was complicit in seizures of their property by Muslims and that the Government policy of dismantling illegal slum settlements disproportionately targeted minority communities.

On July 22, 2004, local government officials in Yuzman, Bahawalpur District, allotted four acres of residential land to two local Muslims. Twenty-six Hindu families had lived on the allotted land for the past 25 years. Protests from the Hindu community had no impact and the local government issued an eviction notice on December 29. Protests to the provincial government were ongoing without result at the end of the reporting period.

On August 12, 2004, Christians in Basti Bohar discovered that local Muslims had seized two acres of their local cemetery for use as agricultural land. The Christians filed a complaint with police, who ordered an investigation that was still ongoing at the end of the reporting period. In the interim, the land remained with the Muslims.

On November 9, 2004, the Christian community in Loghur, Kasur district staged a protest over destruction of their houses. An influential Muslim leader had allegedly bulldozed the houses and taken valuables in order to build a pathway to his property. The Christians had obtained an injunction from the High Court prohibiting the demolition. Police took no action.

The Government did not subject individuals to forced labor or enslavement based on religious beliefs; however, minority community leaders charged that the Government failed to take adequate action to prevent bonded labor in both the brick-making and agricultural sectors. Christians and Hindus were disproportionately victims of this practice. In June, police raided sites in Sheikhpura district, Punjab Province, and freed more than 300 mostly Christian workers performing forced labor in brick kilns.

Islamists charged without proof that government forces damaged mosques and religious schools during military operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The Government vigorously denied the allegations.

Forced Religious Conversion

Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. Religious minorities claimed that Government actions to stem the problem were inadequate.

On August 27, 2004, a Muslim man abducted a 15-year-old Christian, Samina Izhaq, in Faisalabad. The abductor forced Izhaq to convert to Islam and live as his wife. On September 1, following the intervention of Christian NGOs, police freed Izhaq and charged her abductor with kidnapping.

There were no reports of the forced conversion of minor United States citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States. There were reports of the refusal to allow such citizens to return to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were several incidents involving the abuse of specific religious groups carried out by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations by the Secretary of State under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Nationwide, the sectarian violence situation improved during the period covered by this report. Shi'a leaders claimed that the targeted assassinations of professional members of their communities, particularly in Karachi, virtually ended over the last year. They attributed this to Shi'a participation in the MMA and a generally improved relationship with Sunni sects.

Intrasectarian Sunni violence also appeared to decrease in most of the country during the reporting period. Deobandis reported that Sunni Tehrik had largely abandoned its assassination of Deobandi clergy and supporters in Sindh. Deobandi leaders reported one known assassination on October 9, 2004, when unknown gunmen in Karachi killed Mufti Jameel Ahmed Khan and an associate in their vehicle. The assassination might have been linked to a Deobandi-versus-Shi'a cycle of vio-

lence playing out at the same time in Punjab. On May 30, unknown assailants kidnapped, severely tortured, and killed JI senior official Aslam Muhahid in Karachi. The motives were unknown, but the killing appeared to be linked to political violence.

Several troubling trends continued despite this overall improved environment. Sectarian extremist and terrorist groups continued attacks on houses of worship and religious gatherings. The Government banned religious extremist organizations from holding any public gatherings in the wake of renewed sectarian violence in October 2004. Deobandi extremist groups included Lashkar-e-Janghvi, a designated foreign terrorist organization, and Sipah-i-Sahaba, a group banned under Pakistani law.

In October 2004, a cycle of sectarian violence in the Punjab, which had not seen any for several years, broke out. On October 1, a suicide bomber, likely affiliated with Lashkar-e-Janghvi, attacked a Shi'a mosque during Friday prayers in Sialkot, killing 31 and injuring more than 40. In retaliation, on October 7, a subsequently arrested member of the Shi'a extremist group Sipah-i-Mohammad, Amjad Shah, exploded two bombs during a gathering in Multan to mark the death of Deobandi extremist Maulana Azam Tariq. Thirty-nine persons were killed and 100 were injured. On October 10, a suicide bomber affiliated with Lashkar-e-Janghvi killed 4 and injured 10 when he detonated a device at the entrance to a Shi'a mosque in Lahore.

In addition, there appeared to be a new wave of attacks on celebrations at Sufi shrines in 2005, likely led by Deobandi extremists who long had termed the celebrations "idolatrous." On March 19, more than 40 died and more than 100 were injured from a bomb explosion at the shrine to Pir Syed Rakheel Shah in Jhal Magsi District, Balochistan during Shi'a and Brailvi ceremonies commemorating the saint's death. The Government blamed the attack on Lashkar-e-Janghvi. On May 27, a suicide bomber attacked the Bari Imam Shrine outside Islamabad during Shi'a and Brailvi ceremonies on the anniversary of the saint's death. At least 20 died and at least 100 were injured.

On January 8, Deobandi extremists shot and killed Shi'a cleric Agha Ziauddin Rizvi in Gilgit, Northern Areas, setting off a new wave of sectarian tension and violence in that region. In subsequent demonstrations in Gilgit, Karimabad, and Skardu, Shi'a rioters killed 15 Sunni. Sources familiar with the region claimed that both Shi'a and Deobandi extremist groups stepped up activities in Gilgit following the riots, creating two separate armed camps and a serious law-and-order problem. Extremists on both sides attacked properties belonging to adherents of the rival sect and assaulted its members. Both sides harassed and assaulted Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan in Gilgit, claiming they supported the opposite camp. On March 23, Shi'a assailants killed the former Inspector General of Police for the Northern Areas Sakhiullah Tareen in Gilgit. Sectarian tension in Gilgit remained unresolved at the time of the report, although the situation in other parts of the Northern Areas had returned to normal.

On May 30, a suicide bomber and 3 armed accomplices attacked a Shi'a mosque in Karachi, killing 5 and injuring at least 30. The Government termed it a sectarian attack and blamed Lashkar-e-Janghvi.

Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan came under threat of societal violence for the first time during the period covered by this report. In addition to conducting attacks against community members in Gilgit, Deobandi extremist groups vandalized schools and health clinics in the Northern Areas and the neighboring Chitral district of NWFP that the Aga Khan Foundation had established. On December 27, unknown assailants believed to be linked to Deobandi extremist groups killed two Ismaili employees of the Aga Khan Health Service Office in Chitral and burned vehicles belonging to the organization.

Al-Qa'ida-linked organizations maintained networks in the country, and its supporters periodically issued anti-Semitic statements. Hafiz Saeed, leader of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization, consistently issued statements calling for holy war against Jews and Hindus. Government authorities charged 10 members of Jandullah, an extremist group linked to al-Qa'ida, with a string of bombings including the January 15, 2004, attack on the Pakistan Bible Society office in Karachi.

In accordance with the Anti-Terrorist Act, the Government banned the activities of and membership in several religious extremist and terrorist groups. The Anti-Terrorist Act allows the Government to use special streamlined courts to try violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts or speech designed to foment religious hatred, and crimes against the State. However, many of the groups that the Government banned still remained active.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to bolster religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

In January 2005, the President signed into law new procedures for the implementation of both the blasphemy laws and the Hudood Ordinances. Under the new procedures, senior police officials must investigate all blasphemy cases before charges are filed, and a court order must precede women's detention under the extramarital sex provisions of the Hudood Ordinances. Human rights campaigners had agitated for such changes since 2000 but, by the end of the reporting period, were skeptical of their impact and continued to press for outright repeal of the laws. However, early indications were that the perceived changes were reducing the abuse of the laws. In May the Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology stated that "Hudood Laws are not divine scriptures and thus can be changed."

The Government maintained its existing ban on terrorist and sectarian organizations known to be active in the country. The assets of such organizations remained frozen, and their identified leaders were under surveillance. Although most of the banned organizations continued to try and operate, the Government policies of monitoring, periodic raids on safe houses, periodic detention of leaders and activists, and denial of financial resources were effective in diminishing such groups' impact.

The Government remained in active negotiations with the sectarian boards, or wafaqs, which oversee the vast majority of the country's Islamic religious schools, or madrassahs. During the period covered by this report, the wafaqs began utilizing paid investigators to ensure the compliance of all member madrassahs with previous bans on the teaching of religious and sectarian hatred and the use of madrassahs for terrorist or extremist recruiting. Wafaqs oversaw an ongoing phase-in of modern subjects such as English, math, and science at the government's request. Wafaqs also complied with government reporting requirements on foreign students and audited accounts. In May, the Chair of the Education Minister created a new Madrassah Reform Committee to resolve outstanding questions on registration, examination and disbursement of \$100 million (approximately 5.8 billion rupees) in available funds to qualified madrassahs. However, by the end of the reporting period, the committee had failed to make headway and funding remained stalled.

In March 2005, the Government presented draft legislation for creation of a National Human Rights Commission. The Government continued to work with the international community to revise the draft legislation to ensure a strong, independent monitoring body.

A 3-year Human Rights Mass Awareness and Education Project, which the Government began in 2001 with funding from the Asian Development Bank, concluded in 2004. The program actively engaged several NGOs. The Government continued to include human rights awareness as part of its police training program.

In May, 58 religious leaders representing the 6 major Islamic schools of thought in the country issued a joint religious injunction, or fatwa, against sectarian attacks on Muslims and, less directly, the killing of non-Muslims in the country. The Religious Affairs Minister was the driving force behind the fatwa and facilitated the negotiation.

In September 2004, Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi leaders held the inaugural meeting of the World Council of Religions in Islamabad. President Musharraf firmly backed the initiative, assisted in the council's organization, and presided over its opening session. The Council's goal was to promote increased interaction and dialogue among various faiths. The Council continued to organize sessions throughout the country with the support of local and provincial governments. In addition, the Religious Affairs Ministry and the Islamic Ideology Council organized a number of smaller inter-sectarian and interfaith meetings and dialogue sessions. As a result of these meetings, Deobandi and JI religious and political leaders significantly toned down anti-Christian and anti-Hindu rhetoric.

On Christmas 2004, the Government displayed its commitment to "enlightened moderation," an agenda focused on tolerance and religious harmony. Leaders including the President urged intercommunal peace, and state-owned television devoted much of its programming to Christmas rather than typical coverage of Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, whose birthday is celebrated on December 25.

Courts took some steps toward administering the law fairly where religious matters were concerned. Original trial courts acquitted two blasphemy defendants during the period covered by this report. In September 2004, the Sessions Court Lahore acquitted Iftikhar Ahmed, a Muslim, for desecration of the Qur'an in 2000. It found that he suffered from a mental disorder. In December 2004, the trial court cleared Anwar Masih of charges that he insulted the Prophet in 2003. The court found all evidence against Masih to be hearsay. In November 2004, the Peshawar High Court overturned the blasphemy conviction of Munawar Mohsin, former Frontier Post copy

editor, who was originally convicted in 2003 for publishing a letter to the editor derogatory of the Prophet.

In response to JI and Deobandi calls for the Government to declare Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan to be non-Muslims, the Government made clear it would not accede to the campaign and openly defended the development work of the Aga Khan Foundation. The President maintained regular contact with the Aga Khan and accompanied him on a May trip to the Northern Areas where most of the Aga Khan's followers resided. The Government also refused to give in to Islamist pressure to abandon curriculum reform and the concept of a national educational examination board.

According to press reports, after Saudi authorities arrested 40 Pakistani Christians for proselytizing in April, the Government pressured Saudi Arabia successfully for the prisoners' release.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the country's religious communities remained tense. Violence against religious minorities and between Muslim sects continued. Most believed that a small minority were responsible for attacks; however, discriminatory legislation and the teaching of religious intolerance in public schools created a permissible environment for attacks. Police at times refused to prevent violence and harassment or refused to charge persons who commit such offenses.

Ahmadi individuals and institutions long have been victims of religious violence, much of which is instigated by organized religious extremists. Ahmadi leaders charge that militant Sunni mullahs and their followers sometimes stage marches through the streets of Rabwah, a predominantly Ahmadi town and spiritual center in central Punjab. Backed by crowds of between 100 and 200 persons, the mullahs reportedly denounce Ahmadis and their founder, a situation that sometimes leads to violence. The Ahmadis claim that police generally are present during these marches but does not intervene to prevent violence.

On July 23, 2004, several thousand Sunni Muslims demonstrated in the Ahmadi-majority city of Chenab Nagar (Rabwah) over a decision to relocate the local police station. The station, which had included a small makeshift mosque, had been constructed on land loaned by the Ahmadiyya community. The local Islamic leadership objected to the return of the mosque site to the Ahmadi owners. On September 6, the provincial government, bowing to public pressure, ordered the site returned to police.

On July 30, 2004, unknown assailants shot at Shahid Ahmad Dar, an Ahmadi, in Lahore. The assailants fired after yelling religious insults at Dar while he was returning home from shopping. He was not injured.

On August 11, 2004, a mob led by local Muslim religious leaders attacked a construction site in Tatlay Aali, Gujranwala district, where Ahmadis were building a new house of worship. Police ordered the Ahmadis to cease construction. The Ahmadiyya community obtained permission from local authorities to proceed, but the mob again attacked the sight, and police barred construction from continuing indefinitely.

On August 21, unknown assailants shot and killed Barkatullah Mangla, an Ahmadi lawyer and president of the local Ahmadiyya community in Sargodha. The murder took place shortly after Mangla returned home from offering his nightly prayers. Assailants called at his home, asked to see him, and then shot him in his garden. No one had been arrested by the end of the reporting period.

In November 2004, Muhammad Ishaq Danish converted to the Ahmadiyya community. Upon learning of his conversion, his brother beat him with a hockey stick until he lost consciousness and then expelled him from the family home.

On December 20, 2004, Ahmadis were replacing the roof on a house in Sahiwal, Sarghoda district, which was used as a place of worship. At the instigation of local Muslim religious leaders, a mob of 30 attacked the construction site and burned both the new roof and items in the worship room. Police took no action against those responsible.

Sectarian violence against Christians continued during the period covered by this report.

On October 20 and 24, 2004, unknown assailants threw bombs into the courtyard of a Christian church in Rawalpindi. In both cases, parish staff discovered the grenades and contacted police. The bomb disposal unit deactivated them before they could explode.

On March 16, a mob attacked a group of more than 60 women who had gathered in a Christian church in Miskeen Musharaf Colony in Islamabad for prayer and fasting. More than 150 persons attacked the women, grabbing them by the hair,

beating them, and damaging church property. The local Muslim religious leader objected to the construction of the church building located about 100 meters from his mosque, and he and his students reportedly led the attack on the women.

On March 28, five gunmen opened fire on Christians leaving Easter services at a church in Lahore, killing one and injuring seven. Police arrested two of the assailants. The motivation for the attack appeared to be a land dispute between local Muslims and the Christian community. The Muslims wanted Christians to relinquish the land on which their church and graveyard were constructed. The land, provided decades ago to the Christian community by the Muslims' ancestors, had surged in value with the expansion of Lahore.

On April 7, Pastor Shamoon Babar and his Catholic driver, Daniel Emmanuel, were found dead on a Peshawar road. Unknown assailants had kidnapped the two on April 5, and police surmised they had been tortured and shot several times while bound. Some reports claimed Babar's body was mutilated. Babar's family claimed that he had received threats prior to his death warning him to stop his religious activities. Police suspected that Babar's non-religious business activities might have been the motivating factor in the crime; however, the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA) believed the killings to be religiously motivated.

On April 23, seven or eight Muslim youths attacked Shahbaz Masih, a Catholic in Mandi Bahauddin district. The assailants dragged Masih into a field and beat him, breaking both his legs and leaving him there. They then called his parents and informed them that he was dead. His parents found him and took him to the local hospital. According to local Christian leaders, Masih's friendly relationship with his Muslim employer motivated the attack. Muslims in the district felt that Masih was not sufficiently subservient to his employer.

Hindus faced societal violence, often directed at their temples, during the period covered by this report. Criminals targeted Hindu businessmen for kidnap, particularly in Karachi. Hindus claimed they were forced to pay ransoms after police did little to recover kidnap victims.

On May 21, unidentified persons killed Bhagat Mohan Bheel, the Hindu caretaker of a temple at Sanjero, Sanghar District. The assailants then ransacked the temple, destroying statues. Police made no arrests. On October 15, 2004, unidentified persons occupied the Hindu temple of Baba Ganga-Nath in Hyderabad at gunpoint. The police took no action to reclaim the building.

In the past, Sikhs had not faced societal violence in the country; however, on September 25, a Muslim mob attacked the Sikh Gurudwara Junam Asthan in the village of Nankana Sahib, causing damage to the shrine. A government report, which stated that the land on which the Guru Nanak Degree College was located rightfully belonged to the Gurudwara, angered the mob. The National Assembly called on the Punjab provincial government to prosecute those responsible. Police arrested several persons in connection with the case. In May 2005, the Punjab Government issued a notification upgrading Nankana Sahib to a district, an action that gives the area additional autonomy and revenue rights and that helped appease the Sikh community.

Ahmadis suffered from societal harassment and discrimination. Even the rumor that someone might be an Ahmadi or had Ahmadi relatives could stifle opportunities for employment or promotion. Most Ahmadis were home-schooled or went to private, Ahmadi-run schools. Ahmadi students in public schools often were subject to abuse by their non-Ahmadi classmates. The quality of teachers assigned to predominately Ahmadi schools by the Government reportedly was poor. In 2002, in response to a question from Islamic clerics, President Pervez Musharraf, who had been accused of favoring Ahmadis, declared that he believed Ahmadis to be "non-Muslims."

While many Christians belonged to the poorest socioeconomic groups and faced discrimination, the reason might have more to do with ethnic and social factors than with religion. Many poor Christians remained in the profession of their low-caste Hindu ancestors, most of whom were "untouchables." Their position in society, although somewhat better today than in the past, did not reflect major progress despite more than 100 years of consistent missionary aid and development. Christian students reportedly were forced to eat at separate tables in public schools that are predominately Muslim.

Ismailis reported that they were the objects of resentment of Sunni Muslims due to the comparative economic advances they had made. The Government had not harassed Ismailis; however, they reported that they frequently were pressured to adopt certain practices of conservative Muslims or risk being ostracized socially.

Although there were very few Jewish citizens in the country, anti-Semitic press articles were common in the vernacular press. NGO sources pointed out that since India's 1992 establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel, the Pakistani media,

both mainstream and Islamic, sometimes referred to India as the “Zionist threat on our borders.”

Nonetheless, the attitude of the media was not reflected in the actions of the Government. The Government cooperated in the capture of those responsible for the 2002 abduction and killing of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl.

Some Sunni Muslim groups published literature calling for violence against Ahmadis, Shi’a Muslims, other Sunni sects, Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan, and Hindus. Some newspapers frequently published articles that contained derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews. Sermons at mosques frequently railed against Ahmadis, other Muslim groups, Hindus, and increasingly Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan.

Proselytizing generally was considered socially inappropriate among Muslims; missionaries faced some difficulties due to this perception. For example, some Sunni Muslim groups opposed missionary activities and at times issued verbal threats against missionaries to discourage them from working.

Discrimination in employment based on religion appeared widespread. In particular, Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists said that the employment situation had improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years. Christians and Hindus also found themselves disproportionately represented in the country’s most oppressed social group, bonded laborers; illegal bonded labor was widespread. Agricultural, brick-kiln, and domestic workers often were kept virtually as slaves. The majority of bonded labor in those sectors was non-Muslim. All were subject to the same conditions, whether they were Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. In June, police raided sites in Sheikhpura district, Punjab Province, and freed more than 300 mostly Christian workers performing forced labor in brick kilns. Although the Government removed colonial-era entries for religious affiliation from government job application forms to prevent discrimination in hiring, the faith of some, particularly of Christians and Hindus, often could be ascertained from their names.

Islamic private schools known as madrassahs came to the forefront after September 11, 2001, due to their perceived use as training and recruiting grounds for extremist and terrorist organizations. Subsequent studies showed that only a small fraction of schools fell into this category. The five boards or wafaqs that oversaw most of the country’s madrassahs had already agreed with the Government to undertake substantial reforms. All wafaqs mandated the elimination of teaching that promoted religious or sectarian intolerance and terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs. They appointed inspectors to ensure compliance. All inspectors mandated that affiliated madrassahs supplement religious studies with modern subjects, including English, math, and science. Phased-in approaches were underway at each wafaq’s members. Bureaucratic delay continued to stymie release of government funds for this purpose. Wafaqs also mandated the registration of foreign students with the Government and restricted foreign private funding of madrassahs. Registration and examination issues remained under active discussion with the Government. Some unregistered and Deobandi-controlled madrassahs in the FATA and northern Balochistan continued to teach extremism. Similarly the Dawa schools run by Jamat-ud-Dawa continued such teaching and recruitment for Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization.

Human rights groups claimed that rape was often used against women to humiliate and dishonor them. Minority rights groups claimed that Hindu and Christian women were especially vulnerable.

When blasphemy and other religious cases are brought to court, extremists often pack the courtroom and make public threats against an acquittal. Judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid a confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continue trials indefinitely. As a result, those accused of blasphemy often face lengthy periods in jail and are burdened with increased legal costs and repeated court appearances.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. representatives met and spoke regularly with major Muslim and minority religious groups. Embassy officers also maintained a dialogue with government, religious, and minority community representatives to encourage religious freedom and to discuss problems. Chief concerns during this reporting period included the blasphemy laws, the Hudood Ordinances, curriculum reform in the public education and madrassah education systems, treatment of the Ahmadiyya community, sectarian violence, and growing societal pressure on Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan. U.S. Embassy officials, including the Am-

bassador, met with leaders from communities of all faiths and NGOs working on religious freedom issues.

The U.S. Embassy continued to raise concerns informally about the abuse of the blasphemy laws and Hudood Ordinances with the Government, parliamentarians, and officials. Embassy officials participated in a number of seminars that NGOs organized to discuss these issues with a wide spectrum of stakeholders. During all of these discussions, Embassy officials continued to stress the need for the Government to end abusive and excessively harsh implementation of these laws. The new legislation that the Government enacted in January 2005 represented an important positive step in this direction. In addition to general advocacy on the law, the Embassy continued to monitor a number of high-profile ongoing blasphemy cases and appeals, including the case of Pervez Masih, and provided information to interested parties in the United States.

As part of its overall public education reform program, valued at \$100 million (\$5.8 billion rupees), the United States provided substantial financial support to the Government's curriculum reform initiative, which included eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance.

Embassy officials regularly monitored progress on madrassah reform and encouraged such progress. During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador met with the Religious Affairs Minister to obtain his views on progress toward reform and to urge government cooperation. Senior State Department and Education Department officials also raised concerns about the need for swift reform of the madrassah system with the Education Minister. Embassy officials encouraged and facilitated study by those involved in madrassah reform of the relationship between religious schools and state authorities in the United States, as a possible model for Pakistan.

The Embassy carefully monitored treatment of the Ahmadiyya community. During discussions with Islamic religious leaders, Embassy officials urged reconciliation with the Ahmadiyya community and an end to persecution of this minority. Embassy officials also raised and discussed treatment of the Ahmadis with parliamentarians, encouraging an eventual repeal of anti-Ahmadi laws and a less severe application in the interim.

Embassy officials regularly met with religious and political leaders from all major Islamic groups. During these meetings, they raised the need to end sectarian violence and to define a more cooperative relationship between the sects. Embassy officials encouraged interfaith and intersectarian dialogue initiatives, such as the World Council of Religions. In meetings with officials from the Islamic Ideology Council and the Ministry of Religion, Embassy officials encouraged the bodies to play an active role in promoting sectarian harmony. The Ambassador raised specific concerns about growing sectarian violence in the Northern Areas with the Religious Affairs and Interior Ministers, urging the Government to take corrective action. In particular, he delivered a demarche to the Minister of Religious Affairs on concerns regarding increasing societal pressure on Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan and urged the Minister to take all necessary steps to prevent violence, discrimination, and maltreatment of the Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan.

The Embassy continued programs designed to promote religious tolerance and better understanding of religion in the United States. In April 2004, it provided financial support for the annual American Studies conference organized by the Area Study Center of Quaid-i-Azam University focused on "Politics and Religion in the United States." Also in April, a Fulbright scholar from the Department of Theology at Loyola University spent 2 weeks working with the faculty of the Islamic Research Institute. A grant enabled an NGO in Karachi to conduct a series of videoconference discussions with U.S. interlocutors on the challenges of bringing up young people in the Islamic faith in the modern world.

The Embassy continued to monitor developments in high profile violence against minorities, such as the Easter attacks in Lahore, and provided information to interested parties in the United States.

The Embassy also assisted local and international human rights organizations to follow up specific cases involving religious minorities.

SRI LANKA

The Constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," but Buddhism is not recognized as the state religion. The Constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to practice their religion freely. While the Government publicly endorses this right, in practice there were problems in some areas.

Respect for religious freedom by the Government varied. There was no improvement in the status of religious freedom. There was an increase in attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and in societal tension due to ongoing allegations of forced conversions and debate on anti-conversion legislation. In October 2004, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) party formally proposed a constitutional amendment that would declare Buddhism as the state religion, and on May 6, 2005, despite the Supreme Court's ruling that some sections of the bill were unconstitutional, the JHU presented for its second reading to Parliament a bill that would criminalize conversions. In June 2004, the Minister of Buddhist Affairs presented a separate draft anti-conversion bill to the Cabinet. It was not formally approved; however, it was sent to the Attorney General for review. In April, the Cabinet approved a revised version of the bill and in June, the bill was formally "gazetted," the first step toward introducing it to Parliament; however, by the end of the reporting period, it had not been introduced to Parliament. Since late 2003, the country has witnessed a serious spate of attacks on Christian churches and sometimes pastors and congregants. Approximately 200 attacks have been alleged since 2003, with several dozen confirmed by the Embassy. In response, major political and religious leaders have publicly condemned the attacks and police have arrested and prosecuted close to a dozen people in connection with the incidents.

Despite generally amicable relations among persons of different faiths, there has been an increase in violent resistance by some Buddhists to Christian church activity, in particular against evangelical groups. Although previously the courts generally upheld the right of Christian groups to worship and to construct facilities to house their congregations, a Supreme Court decision promulgated in August 2003 ruled against recognizing a Roman Catholic group and determined that its medical services constituted allurement. The group has protested the ruling to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. At the same time, the Supreme Court ruled that although the Constitution supports the right of individuals to practice any religion, it does not support the right to proselytize. The Supreme Court ruled that sections of the proposed JHU bill would be unconstitutional, but the sections that criminalize forced conversion were generally upheld. At the end of the period covered by this report, the proposed JHU bill had been referred to a special Parliamentary Committee, where it remained under consideration. The State also limits the number of foreign religious workers granted temporary residence permits. Existing societal tensions were exacerbated in some areas where faith-based groups carried out post-tsunami relief and reconstruction activities. In May, at the invitation of the Government, the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom visited and met with various religious groups and civil society.

Embassy officials conveyed U.S. Government concerns about church attacks to Government leaders and urged them to arrest and prosecute the perpetrators. Embassy officials also expressed concern to the Government about the negative impact anti-conversion laws could have on religious freedom. The U.S. Government continues to discuss general religious freedom issues with religious leaders and with the Government in the context of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 25,322 square miles and a population of approximately 19.4 million. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity all are practiced. Approximately 70 percent of the population is Buddhist, 15 percent Hindu, 8 percent Christian, and 7 percent Muslim. Christians tend to be concentrated in the west, with much of the east Muslim and north almost exclusively Hindu.

Most members of the majority Sinhala community are Theravada Buddhists. Almost all Muslims are Sunnis, with a small minority of Shi'a, including members of the Borah community. Almost 90 percent of Christians are Roman Catholics, with Anglicans and other mainstream Protestant churches also present in the cities. The Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Assemblies of God are present as well. Evangelical Christian groups have increased in membership in recent years, although the overall number of members still is small.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution gives Buddhism a "foremost position," but it also provides for the right of members of other faiths to practice their religions freely. The Government's respect for religious freedom varied, and there was no improvement in the status of religious freedom.

Separate ministries in the Government address religious affairs. These include the Ministry of Buddha Sasana, the Department of Muslim Religious & Cultural Affairs, the Ministry of Hindu Religious Affairs, and the Ministry of Christian Affairs. Each of these ministries is empowered to deal with issues involving the religion in question.

On November 19, 2004, the JHU proposed a constitutional amendment declaring Buddhism to be the state religion. The JHU stated that the purpose of the amendment was strictly to protect Buddhism; however, the amendment also contained clauses restricting conversion of Buddhists. On November 25, 2004, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) challenged the amendment, and in December 2004, the CPA's petition was heard before a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court determined that the proposed amendment was inconsistent with the Constitution. The Court also determined that since the amendment sought to repeal parts of the Constitution, a two-thirds majority in the Parliament and a referendum endorsing it would be required for passage.

In July 2004, the JHU presented a proposed "Prohibition of Forcible Conversions" bill before Parliament. In August 2004, the Supreme Court found key parts of the bill unconstitutional. However, sections that would criminalize forced conversion, conversion by deceit, or conversion by allurements were generally upheld. On May 6, the JHU presented the same bill, unamended, for its second reading. The bill was referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee for review. The Standing Committee has 6 months from the date of its composition to consider the bill and any proposed amendments to it. The members of the Standing Committee had not been named by the end of the period covered by this report. In June 2004, the Minister of Buddhist Affairs presented a draft anti-conversion bill to the Cabinet. It was not formally approved, but it was sent to the Attorney General for review. The Cabinet approved a revised bill in April and formally "gazetted" it in June, the first step toward the introduction of the bill in Parliament. By the end of the reporting period, the bill had not been introduced in Parliament. The bills are substantially similar. Both bills carry penalties, including fines or jail sentences, for anyone convicted of or assisting in "unethical" conversion. The private member bill has heavier penalties for converting women and children, whereas the ministerial bill has such penalties only for children. The ministerial bill holds that for any group found guilty of performing "unethical" conversion, all its members may also be found guilty, and that any foreigner found guilty under this act will be deported and may be labeled a "prohibited visitor."

Some Christian denominations resisted greater government involvement in their affairs; instead they are registered individually through acts of Parliament or as corporations under domestic law. Any religious group that wishes to be registered as a corporation must fill out and submit forms in order to be so recognized. This gives the group legal standing in Sri Lanka to be treated as a corporate entity in financial and real estate transactions. There is no tax exemption for religious organizations as such. However, churches and temples are allowed to register as charitable organizations and thus are entitled to some tax exemptions. There is no option for registering as a "religious group." Such groups must either register as a corporation or a charitable organization. In 2003, the Supreme Court ruled against an incorporation petition by the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Third Order of Saint Francis. The court claimed that the order could not be incorporated if it was involved in proselytization and providing material benefit. In April 2004, the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) asked the Government to provide a response. The Government raised technical objections, and the UNCHR said that it would review them, based on both the substantive issues and the technical objections; a response was expected in August 2004, but no response had been received by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government has placed renewed emphasis on the work of national councils for interfaith understanding in the wake of the attacks on Christian churches and evangelical groups' property.

Despite the constitutional preference for Buddhism, a number of major religious festivals of other faiths are celebrated as national holidays. These include the Hindu Thai Pongal, New Year, and Deepawali festivals; the Muslim Hadji and Ramzan festivals and Muhammad's birthday; and Christian Good Friday and Christmas.

Religion is a mandatory subject in the school curriculum. Parents and children may choose whether a child studies Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity. Students of other religions can pursue religious instruction outside of the public school system, for there are no separate syllabuses provided for smaller religions. Schools teach religion from an academic point of view. In public schools, students

receive religious instruction based on the religion identified on their birth certificate (every birth certificate includes a religious designation) and other documents.

Issues related to family law, including divorce, child custody, and inheritance, are adjudicated by the customary law of each ethnic or religious group. The minimum age of marriage for women is 18 years, except in the case of Muslims, who continue to follow their customary religious practices. The application of different legal practices based on membership in a religious or ethnic group may result in discrimination against women.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Foreign clergy may work in the country, but for the last three decades, the Government has limited its issuance of temporary work permits. Permission usually is restricted to denominations that are registered formally with the Government. Most religious workers in the country are native in origin.

During the period covered by this report, Christians, both mainstream denominations and evangelical groups, encountered increased harassment and physical attacks by some local Buddhists who felt threatened by these groups. Some Christian groups sometimes complained that the Government tacitly condoned harassment and violence. In some cases, the police response was inadequate, and local police officials reportedly were reluctant to take legal action against individuals involved in the attacks.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Since 1983 the Government (controlled by the Sinhalese, and predominantly Buddhist, majority) has fought the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a terrorist organization fighting for a separate state for the country's Tamil (and predominantly Hindu) minority. However, in 2001, the Government and the LTTE each announced unilateral cease fires and in 2002, a joint ceasefire accord was agreed to by the parties. The peace process is fragile; in 2003, the LTTE pulled out of talks with the Government. Religion did not play a significant role in the conflict, which is rooted in linguistic, ethnic, and political differences. Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians all have been affected by the conflict, which has claimed more than 60,000 lives. The military issued warnings through public radio before commencing major operations, instructing civilians to congregate in safe zones around churches and temples; however, in conflict areas in the north, the Government occasionally was accused of bombing and shelling Hindu temples and Christian churches. In 2003, some Buddhist clergy were allowed to visit shrines in LTTE-controlled areas for the first time in many years. Some Christians also visited holy sites in LTTE-controlled areas that had not been accessible during the period of armed conflict.

Unlike in previous years, the LTTE did not target Buddhist sites during the period covered by this report; however, the LTTE has not indicated that it will abstain from attacking such targets in the future. In 2003, the Kandy High Court sentenced to death three persons for their involvement in the 1998 bombing of Dalada Maligawa, "the Temple of the Tooth," the holiest Buddhist shrine in the country. Thirteen worshipers, including several children, were killed by the bombing. The judge sentenced two others to 680 years rigorous imprisonment and a third to 490 years. Following this incident, the Government has augmented security at a number of religious sites island-wide, including the Temple of the Tooth.

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.

Allegations by Buddhist extremists of Christian involvement in unethical or forced conversions continue to be a source of tension between the two communities. Christians deny this charge, responding that people undergo conversion of their own free will. There were reports that members of some evangelical groups made disparaging comments about Buddhism while engaging in evangelical activities. Some groups have also alleged that Christians engage in aggressive proselytism and take advantage of societal ills such as general poverty, war, and lack of education. Christians countered that their relief efforts were in earnest and were not targeted at conversion.

In May, at the invitation of the Government, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion Asma Jahangir held several meetings on religious freedom in the country. She concluded that while allegations of forced or coerced conversion remained vague and no direct testimonies were available, second-hand accounts by credible sources indicated that conversions through improper means have sometimes occurred.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

The LTTE has been listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. since 1997. While Muslims, Tamils, Sinhalese, and Christians all have been victimized by the LTTE, religious persecution has not played a major role in the conflict.

In 1990, the LTTE expelled some 46,000 Muslim inhabitants—virtually the entire Muslim population—from their homes in the northern part of the island. Most of these persons remain displaced and live in or near welfare centers. Although some Muslims returned to the northern town of Jaffna in 1997, they did not remain there due to the continuing threat posed by the LTTE. There are credible reports that the LTTE has warned thousands of Muslims displaced from the Mannar area not to return to their homes until the conflict is over. It appears not that the LTTE's actions against Muslims are targeted due to Muslims' religious beliefs but rather that they are part of an overall strategy to clear the north and east of persons unsympathetic to the LTTE. The LTTE has made some conciliatory statements to the Muslim community, but some Muslims viewed the statements with skepticism. The LTTE continues to encourage Muslim Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to return home, asserting they will not be harmed. Although some Muslim IDPs have returned home, the vast majority has not and is waiting for a Government guarantee of safety in LTTE-controlled areas. Since the peace process began in 2001, the LTTE has also carried out a number of attacks in the east in which Muslims have been killed. No arrests have been made in these cases. In 2003, four Muslims were killed; while the LTTE denied any involvement, this incident fueled tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the area.

On December 25, 2004, a group of men in the LTTE-controlled area of Vakeneri in Batticaloa district attacked and damaged what was described as a Christian family church. The police reported that two men inside the church were assaulted and that the church was damaged. The police claimed they were unable to take any action against the accused as the area was under LTTE control.

On April 24, the chief priest of Annapani Hindu temple at Ariyampathi in Batticaloa was shot, allegedly by an LTTE pistol gang, while attending to religious activities in the temple. The priest and two others who were also injured were admitted to Batticaloa hospital with serious injuries. While the police continued their investigation during the period of this report, because the area was controlled by the LTTE, no action was taken.

On May 17, during an LTTE-sponsored strike over the erection of a Buddha statue on public land in Trincomalee in the eastern province of Sri Lanka, a Sinhala youth was killed and four members of the same family were injured when a grenade was thrown at them. On May 18, the Trincomalee Magistrate instructed the authorities to remove the Buddha statue. On June 17, the Court of Appeals in Colombo issued a suspension of that order. At the end of the period covered by this report, the statue remained at the contested site.

The LTTE has been accused in the past of using church and temple compounds, where civilians are instructed by the Government to congregate in the event of hostilities, as shields for the storage of munitions.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

At the height of the attacks on Christian churches, several Government leaders, including the President and the Minister of Christian Affairs, publicly denounced the attacks. On February 20, at a ceremony held at the Buddhist and Pali University, President Kumaratunga said that such attacks would not be tolerated and ordered the police to fully investigate each incident. The President also pledged to act against extremists. On November 2, 2004, the first meeting of the newly formed National Advisory Committee for Peace & Reconciliation (NACPR), formed by President Kumaratunga, took place. The Committee will deliberate on an ongoing basis on issues pertaining to the peace process, and it will promote understanding and reconciliation among different communities.

Since late 2003, police have arrested almost a dozen people connected with various attacks. Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also convened regular meetings of the four ministers dealing with religious issues as part of their portfolio and established religious "amity" committees around the island. In May 2004, leading Catholic and Buddhist clergy met to continue a dialogue on religious tolerance.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Discrimination based on religious differences is much less common than discrimination based on ethnicity. In general, the members of the various faiths tend to be tolerant of each other's religious beliefs. There has been an increase in harassment of Christians and attacks on their property and places of worship by Buddhist ex-

tremists opposed to conversion. Some government officials and leaders of different faiths publicly condemned these attacks.

The police made attempts to investigate many of these incidents when complaints were made, but were often reluctant to pursue criminal charges against the suspected perpetrators, some of whom were Buddhist monks. Law enforcement officials believe that a majority of the attacks were conducted by a small number of extremist Buddhists. By early 2005, several alleged attackers had been arrested. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka reports that although approximately 40 percent of incidents were never reported to the police, approximately 50 attacks have taken place during the period covered by this report. The Embassy has confirmed most of these attacks. The Evangelical Alliance also reported that more than 100 attacks took place in the previous reporting period.

No action was taken during the period covered by this report in the 2003 attack against a member of the Assembly of God church in Thanamalwila or the 2003 attack against Pastor Rozario. However, police continued to investigate.

No action was taken in the three separate attacks that occurred in Ratnapura in 2003. However, investigations remained ongoing.

No action was taken in the February 2004, attack against the World Vision office in Kebithigollwa, or the January 2004 arson attack against the Our Mother Most Pure Catholic shrine in Mattegoda.

In February 2004, a large crowd attacked an Apostolic Church at Boraluwewa in Kurunegala, and the church and workers' quarters were burned. Five men who were arrested for the attack remain free on bail. A hearing on this case was scheduled for July 11, 2005.

In April 2004, the Christian Fellowship Church at Wadduwa in Kaluthara district was attacked by a mob led by a Buddhist monk. The attackers threw rocks, attempted to assault worshippers with sticks, and damaged a police vehicle. The police have asked the monk for compensation for the vehicle, and the monk has agreed to pay for the damage; however, the police have not taken any action to settle the dispute between the church and the monk.

In May 2004, a crowd threatened the pastor of the Prayer Tower Church in Mahawewa in reaction to a rumor that he was building a Bible school. Police made no arrests during the period covered by this report.

In May 2004, a mob of armed men attacked the Assembly of God church in Yakkala and assaulted the church members. Police officials arrested three persons, and a trial is pending for September 2005.

On June 19 and 20, 2004, following the introduction of the Ministerial anti-conversion draft bill, large groups, including Buddhist monks, attacked the Christian Fellowship Church in Wadduwa. In response to the June 19 incident, police remained at the church for protection. On June 20, police also were attacked in their attempts to guard the church. Police issued an arrest warrant for one of the Buddhist monks involved in the June 20 attack, but at the end of the period covered by the report, they had not located him.

In August 2004, 3 days after receiving a death threat, Pastor Divakaran of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Gampola, Kandy discovered a fire at his bedroom window. Police investigated; however, no action was taken during the period covered by this report.

In October 2004, the Assemblies of God church in Yakkala, Gampaha district, had human excreta thrown at its outer wall. On November 14, police arrested two men allegedly involved with the attack and referred the matter to the mediation board for settlement.

In December 2004, a concert in Colombo featuring Indian film stars was forced to close down after a hand grenade was thrown at the performers, killing two spectators and injuring several others. Some Buddhist monks had demanded that the concert be cancelled because it coincided with the first death anniversary of a prominent monk. Police continue to investigate and have offered monetary rewards for information leading to an arrest; however, no action was taken during the period covered by this report.

In December 2004, St. Michael's Catholic Church in Kutwana, Colombo district, was set on fire. This was the third attack against the church since 2003. Police made no arrests during the period covered by this report.

On April 25, police arrested Mohamed Nilam, a Muslim, for stoning and damaging a statue of Buddha, in Nugegoda in the outskirts of Colombo. The Magistrate released Nilam on bail and ordered him to report to the police every Sunday morning. The next hearing was scheduled for August 23, 2005.

On May 1, a Buddhist monk-led mob attacked the Zion Prayer Center in Balapitiya, in Galle district. The pastor's wife and two other women were seriously injured in the attack, and furniture and the electric sound system were damaged.

The pastor, who was away from the prayer center at the time of the attack, filed a complaint, which was referred to the Mediation Board. No further action was taken during the period covered by this report.

On the evening of June 5, villagers threw bottles at the newly purchased home of the pastor of the Assembly of God church in Ambalangoda in Galle district. On June 6, following an argument between a mob of approximately 30 and the pastor, the mob attacked the pastor's home causing damage to the windows and fence. The mob, which had grown to more than 50 persons, assaulted the pastor and his brother and stole the pastor's mobile telephone and more than \$2,000 (SLR 200,000) from the men. The home was also vandalized and a Buddha statue and lamps were placed on the property. Police investigated, promptly removed the statue and lamps, and arrested 6 persons who remained free on bail at the end of the period covered by this report. A trial is scheduled for November 28.

There is no indication of preference in employment in the public sector on the basis of religion.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials regularly met with representatives of all the country's religious groups to review a wide range of human rights, ethnic, and religious freedom issues. During the period covered by this report, Embassy representatives met with government officials at the highest level to express U.S. Government concern about the attacks on Christian churches and to discuss the anti-conversion issue. On several occasions, the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom discussed the anti-conversion issue with the country's ambassador to the United States.

The U.S. Government is a strong supporter of the peace process launched by the Government, and the Embassy encourages the interfaith efforts by religious leaders to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 170 square miles, and its population is approximately 68,000. A portion of the population is comprised of citizens of other Caribbean nations, and there is a growing, although still small, percentage of citizens from China. The dominant religion is Christianity, and the Antigua Christian Council represents the religious beliefs practiced by slightly more than 70 percent of the population. Its members are the Anglican, Methodist, Moravian and Roman Catholic Churches and the Salvation Army. The Anglican Church is by far the largest, accounting for an estimated 35 percent of the population. The Methodist and Moravian Churches account for approximately 15 percent each, while the Catholic Church estimates that its membership is 6 percent. Religious freedom for others is not restricted, and evangelical churches, along with several small, independent churches, have flourished in recent years. Jehovah's Witnesses number approximately 400 members. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that includes most independent evangelical churches, claims an estimated 25 percent of the population. There was no information on the number of atheists or persons who did not follow a particular religion.

The total number of non-Christians is small. They include adherents of Islam; the Baha'i Faith, with approximately 50 members; and Rastafarianism, with an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 adherents.

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 is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. However, the Government maintains a close relationship with the Antigua Christian Council. The Prime Minister assumed responsibility for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs in 2004. This previously obscure portfolio within the Ministry of Home Affairs was established upon independence in 1981. Under the administration, the Prime Minister has raised this portfolio to prominence, indicating that his government "strongly advocates the involvement of the Christian community in every aspect of nation building and believes that the church and its leaders have a meaningful role to play." The role of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has been to coordinate and facilitate greater interaction between churches, other religious organizations, and the Government, and to facilitate the free movement of pastors into the country.

The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Currently, ministers of religion are prohibited constitutionally from running for elected office. At the end of the period covered by this report, the prohibition was being examined by the Government, which was considering proposing an amendment to allow them to run.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, groups must incorporate in order to own property. Tax and duty-free concessions, especially for building and development, are available to groups that register.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complain that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals. The Rastafarian movement in Antigua has met with the Prime Minister and submitted a petition to decriminalize the use of marijuana.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Antigua Christian Council conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith. The council, along with a number of other churches, successfully promoted peace during the 2004 national elections. Prior to the vote, the council prepared a "Code of Ethics," which denounced violence, incitement to violence, name-calling, and character assassinations; the code was signed by every candidate.

Rastafarians complain that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

ARGENTINA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, the Constitution states that the Federal Government "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith," and the Government provides it some privileges not available to other religions or denominations.

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; however, discrimination, including anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts, continued to occur. There were a number of governmental and nongovernmental efforts to reduce discrimination and promote interfaith understanding.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,068,302 square miles, and its population is approximately 37 million, according to the most recent census, taken in 2001. The Government does not collect information on religious affiliation. Accurate estimates of religious affiliation are difficult to obtain; however, information supplied by the National Registry of Religions and representatives of various faiths, as well as statis-

tics from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), produce the following estimates, which do not necessarily imply active religious practice: Catholics, 70 percent of the population; Protestants, 9 percent; Muslims, 1.5 percent; Jews, 0.8 percent; other religious groups, 2.5 percent; and the remainder, no declared religious affiliation. Available estimates often are based on outdated census data and questionable presumptions. Although there is a presumption that persons of Middle Eastern origin are Muslim, the Islamic Center in Argentina estimates that only one out of three Middle Eastern immigrants is Muslim, especially those of Syrian or Lebanese origin, whereas the majority are Orthodox Catholic. Muslims total 500,000 to 600,000 persons; Middle Eastern immigrants also include smaller groups of Mennonites and Melchites.

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 grants all residents the right “to profess their faith freely” and states that foreigners enjoy all the civil rights of citizens, including the right “to exercise their faith freely.”

The Constitution states that the federal Government “sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith,” and the Government provides the Catholic Church with a variety of subsidies. The Secretariat of Worship in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and Worship is responsible for conducting the Government’s relations with the Catholic Church, non-Catholic Christian churches, and other religious organizations in the country.

The Secretariat of Worship maintains a National Registry of approximately 2,900 religious organizations representing approximately 30 religious groups and denominations. Religious organizations that wish to obtain tax-exempt status must register with the Secretariat and report periodically to maintain their status. Possession of a place of worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy are among the criteria the Secretariat considers in determining whether to grant or withdraw registration. Registration is not required for private religious services, such as those conducted in homes, but it is necessary for any public activities. Registered religious organizations may bring in foreign missionaries by applying to the Secretariat of Worship, which in turn notifies immigration authorities so that appropriate documents may be issued. There were no reports from any groups that their affiliated foreign missionaries were denied visas.

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

The National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), an independent agency of the Government, nominally under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice (a March 2005 presidential decree transferred jurisdiction of INADI from Interior to Justice), is charged with promoting social and cultural pluralism and combating discriminatory attitudes. INADI, which includes representatives of the major religious faiths on its board, investigates violations of a 1988 law that prohibits discrimination based on “race, religion, nationality, ideology, political opinion, sex, economic position, social class, or physical characteristics,” and it conducts educational programs. The agency also supports victims and promotes proactive measures to prevent discrimination, which include developing a national plan to combat discrimination. In 2004, INADI received complaints of nine incidents—seven anti-Semitic and two anti-Islamic—that it determined were discriminatory based on religious reasons.

In March 2005, INADI found that Military Chaplain General Bishop Antonio Baseotto violated anti-discrimination laws with “pejorative and unfavorable” comments he made during a service on a military base in October 2004, in which he criticized Muslim immigration in Europe.

This same bishop created a rift between the Government and the Vatican when, on February 17, 2005, he sent a letter to Health Minister Gines Gonzalez Garcia stating that those who “offend the little ones should have a millstone placed around their neck and be cast into the sea.” This sentiment—a biblical reference—was meant to express the bishop’s opposition to Health Ministry policies favoring the promotion of contraceptive distribution and the Minister’s statements calling for the decriminalization of abortion. For the Government, the bishop’s comments were too reminiscent of the notorious “death flights” used by the military government of the

late 1970s and early 1980s to dispose of leftist guerillas and alleged sympathizers. The Government called for the bishop's immediate removal as Chaplain General, a position appointed by the Vatican. The Vatican refused and the Government unilaterally removed its recognition of Baseotto as Chaplain General, which led various Church authorities to make allegations of a campaign against Catholics. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government and the Vatican had not resolved the issue.

INADI continued to study the case of Buenos Aires city government legislator Mirta Onega, who was caught on tape in 2004 using pejorative language in referring to a subordinate Jewish employee. The city legislature formed a special investigative commission that recommended a 180-day suspension for Onega, but there were insufficient votes in the plenary session to sanction the legislator. The case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Secretariat of Worship sought to promote religious harmony by sending official representatives to events such as religious freedom conferences, rabbinical ordinations, Rosh Hashana and Eid al-Fitr celebrations, and religious activities held by Protestant and Orthodox churches.

Three Christian holy days are observed as national holidays: Good Friday, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. In addition, the law provides for 3 days of excused and paid leave for those observing the Jewish holy days of New Year, the Days of Atonement, and Passover, and also for those observing the Islamic holy days of the Muslim New Year.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government provides the Catholic Church with some subsidies not available to other religious groups. These subsidies, estimated at approximately \$4 million per annum, are administered by the Secretariat of Worship. They have been described as compensation for expropriation of properties that belonged to Catholic institutions in the colonial era.

A number of non-Catholic Christian organizations have questioned the constitutionality of the National Registry for Religions and have taken issue with regulations requiring prior approval from the Government to establish churches, the need to provide police checks for church officials, and the need for each new branch of a registered church to register separately and undergo what they claim to be redundant bureaucratic requirements. In the second half of 2004 and again in February 2005, the Federation of Argentine Evangelical Churches raised the issue with the Foreign Ministry's Secretary of Worship and submitted a number of suggestions to the Secretary for amending or abolishing the requirements. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Secretary had not made a final decision on the federation's suggestions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

In September 2004, the 3-judge panel of Federal Oral Court No. 3 acquitted all 22 Argentine defendants charged in connection with the 1994 terrorist bombing of the AMIA Jewish Community Center, in which 85 persons were killed. The panel faulted the investigation of the original judge and prosecutors and called for an investigation into the handling of that investigation and trial. Criminal Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral reconfirmed the validity of international arrest warrants against 12 Iranian citizens (including the former Iranian ambassador to Argentina at the time of the attack) and a Lebanese citizen implicated in the attack.

There were no developments in the investigation of the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

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; however, religious discrimination, particularly anti-Semitism, remained a problem. NGOs actively promoted interfaith understanding. Ecumenical attendance was common at important religious events, such as the Jewish community's annual Holocaust commemoration.

NGOs promoting religious fraternity include the Argentine Jewish-Christian Brotherhood (an affiliate of the International Council of Christians and Jews), the

Argentine Council for Religious Freedom, the Foundation for Education for Peace, and the Federation of Arab Entities (Latin America), known as FEARAB. Cooperation has been particularly notable between FEARAB (Latin America), representing Muslims and Christians of Arab origin; the Islamic Center of the Republic of Argentina; and the Delegation of Israeli Argentine Associations (DAIA), the political representation of Argentine Jewry, to prevent religious tensions stemming from political conflicts in the Middle East.

Most published reports of anti-religious acts concerned anti-Semitic activity, although there were also reports of isolated anti-Muslim and anti-Christian acts. INADI worked to combat religious discrimination and other forms of intolerance.

A number of reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim incidents appeared during the period covered by this report. In its annual study on anti-Semitism in the country, the DAIA Center for Social Studies found a total of 174 anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, a figure similar to those of previous years. The report also highlighted discrimination against other groups, including anti-Muslim acts. Among the anti-Semitic incidents noted were the Onega case, anti-Semitic expressions against a rabbi during a lecture at the National University of Entre Rios, and vandalism of Jewish buildings and cemeteries. The DAIA report also highlighted a number of positive events and actions, such as the Government's denial of legal status to the New Triumph Party, a right-wing nationalist group of anti-Semitic activists headed by Alejandro Biondini that frequently posted anti-Semitic comments on its website.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, Embassy officers met periodically with various religious leaders and attended events organized by faith-based organizations and NGOs that addressed questions of religious freedom.

The Embassy continued to provide support for the investigation into the 1994 AMIA bombing. For example, the legal attaché continued to respond to investigative leads in the AMIA case from the federal court charged with the terrorism inquiry.

The Embassy also continued to assist the Government's implementation of a Holocaust Education Project, conducted under the auspices of the International Holocaust Education Task Force.

BAHAMAS

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 13,939 square miles, and its population is approximately 340,000.

There is a wide variety of religious beliefs. More than 90 percent of the population professes a religion, and anecdotal evidence suggests that most attend services regularly. The country is ethnically diverse and includes a Haitian minority of legal and illegal immigrants estimated at 40,000 to 60,000 persons, and a white/European minority that is nearly as large. The country's religious profile reflects this diversity. Protestant Christian denominations—including Baptists (35 percent), Anglicans (15 percent), Presbyterians, Methodists, evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists—are in the majority, but there are also significant Roman Catholic (14 percent) and Greek Orthodox populations. Smaller Jewish, Baha'i, and Muslim communities also are active. A small number of Bahamians and Haitians, particularly those living in the Family Islands, practice Obeah, a Bahamian version of voodoo. Practicing Obeah is illegal under the Penal Code. A small but stable number of citizens identify themselves as Rastafarians, while some members of the country's small resident Guyanese and Indian populations practice Hinduism and other South Asian religions. Al-

though many unaffiliated Protestant congregations are almost exclusively black, most mainstream churches are integrated racially.

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.

Although there is often reference to the country's strong Christian heritage in political and public discourse, there is no established or official state religion. Clergy are trained freely in the country, and the Constitution specifically forbids infringement of a person's freedom to change religion.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Whit Monday are national holidays, although there are no negative consequences for those who choose not to observe them.

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

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

The Government meets regularly with religious leaders, both publicly and privately, to discuss social, political, and economic issues.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Government permits foreign clergy and missionaries to enter the country and to proselytize and practice their religion without restriction.

Over time, Haitian migrants have brought elements of voodoo to the country from Haiti. The practice of Obeah is illegal under Chapter 84, Section 232 of the Penal Code. Those caught practicing Obeah, or attempting to intimidate, steal, inflict disease, or restore a person to health under the guise of Obeah, may receive a sentence of 3 months' imprisonment.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Society can be less tolerant of religions perceived as foreign, particularly Obeah or other forms of voodoo. Some Bahamians publicly describe the poverty and political unrest in Haiti as signs of God's disapproval of the practice of voodoo.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

BARBADOS

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 166 square miles, and its population is approximately 277,000. Christianity is the dominant religion; over 95 percent of the population is considered Christian, although they may not be active in any particular denomination. The Anglican Church, the first denomination established in the country, constitutes the largest religious group, with about 70,000 members, a number that has held steady in recent years. About 65 percent of members are active in the Church.

The next largest denomination is the Seventh-day Adventists, numbering about 16,000 members, 10,000 of whom are active. The first Adventist missionary arrived in 1891, and the denomination has grown rapidly since incorporation in 1933.

The Roman Catholic Church has been present since 1839. There are about 11,000 Roman Catholics; an estimated 20 percent are active. In the early and mid-twentieth century, the Catholic Church was bolstered by immigration from Guyana, Dominica, St. Lucia, and by Syrian and Lebanese Christians from Trinidad. It is expanding slowly through natural growth and a small number of converts.

Pentecostals number about 7,000; membership is growing and over 50 percent are active. Methodists number an estimated 5,000, according to church officials, although many more claimed Methodist affiliation in the last official census; about 60 percent of members are active. There are approximately 2,500 Jehovah's Witnesses, and over 95 percent are active; membership grew by 3 percent between 2002 and 2003. Baptists, Moravians, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are present in small numbers.

The number of non-Christians is small. There are an estimated 2,700 Muslims, most of whom are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the Indian state of Gujarat. A few immigrants from Guyana, Trinidad, South Asia, and the Middle East, as well as about 200 Barbadians, comprise the rest of the growing Muslim community. The first mosque was erected in 1950, and there are currently three mosques and an Islamic Center.

Other minority religions include Rastafarianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and 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. 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 is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Religious instruction is included in the public school curriculum as "values education." The focus is on Christianity, but representatives from minority religions are also invited to speak to students. The Rastafarian community has requested government assistance in setting up a primary school, stating that the government schools instill beliefs in their children that conflict with their faith—a situation that can only be rectified if the Rastafarians have their own learning institution. By the end of the period covered in this report, the Government had not responded to their request.

In 2002 and 2003, the Government held interfaith services to celebrate National Day. Most of the religious groups participated, although some evangelical Christian denominations refused to worship with non-Christians on the grounds that doing so would violate the tenets of their faith.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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

Foreign missionaries must apply for and obtain entry visas. These are obtained easily, and there are no other special requirements imposed to obtain them.

Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, is illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring. Following a prison riot in March 2005, prison officials shaved the dreadlocks of Rastafarian prisoners after the discovery of contraband in the hair of some members. Some of the prisoners complained that the shaving of their dreadlocks violated their religious rights.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. With over 125 denominations, the country has a history of being open to diverse faiths and forms of worship. Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist, and Muslim communities stated that they had experienced occasional criticism for their religious beliefs and practices, but generally felt that the society was very tolerant. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

BELIZE

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 8,867 square miles and its population is approximately 280,000. There is a growing Mestizo population (48.7 percent), a diminishing Creole component (24.9 percent), a stable Mayan element (10.6 percent), and a Garifuna component (6.1 percent); the balance of the population (9.7 percent) includes Europeans, East Indians, Chinese, Arabs, and North Americans. More citizens are Roman Catholic (49.6 percent) than any other faith.

Despite the long period of British colonial rule, only 5.3 percent of the population is Anglican. Another 7.4 percent is Pentecostal. Other faiths and denominations in-

clude Baptists (3.5 percent), Methodists (3.5 percent), Seventh-day Adventists (5.2 percent), and Mennonites (4.1 percent). There are approximately 6,000 Nazarenes, and modest numbers of Hindus, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Rastafarians, and Salvation Army members. Except for the Mennonites and Pentecostals, who mostly live in the rural districts of Cayo and Orange Walk, followers of these minority faiths tend to live in Belize City. Roman Catholics are numerous throughout the country and constitute the majority faith in all but two of the country's six districts; in Belize and Cayo districts, Catholics hold a plurality of the population, but do not constitute a majority. Approximately 10 percent of citizens identify themselves as nonbelievers or members of no religious congregation. (All figures except total population are from the country's 2000 census.)

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; however, the preamble to the Constitution reads, "the nation of Belize shall be founded upon principles which acknowledge the supremacy of God." A 2002 amendment to the Constitution expanded the appointed Senate to 12 persons, 1 of whom is appointed by the Governor General acting in accordance with the advice of the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Association of Churches. The membership of these organizations includes several Christian denominations, among them Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist.

Under the Constitution, freedom of religion is part of a broader protection—that of freedom of conscience. In addition, the Constitution provides that no one shall be compelled to take an oath that is contrary to a person's religion or belief. Discrimination on religious grounds is illegal and rarely occurs.

There are no special registration requirements or fees for religious organizations, and legal incorporation for a religion or denomination is a simple matter. Property taxes are not levied against churches and other places of worship. However, property taxes are levied against other church-owned buildings occupied on a regular basis, such as the pastor's or priest's residence. Clergy preach, teach, and train freely.

The traditional Christian holy days of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Monday, and Christmas are observed as national holidays.

The Constitution stipulates that religious communities may establish "places of education" and states that "no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community." Although there is no state religion, the educational system maintains by statute a strong religious curriculum. The curriculum ties "spirituality" with social studies courses. It requires in both public and private schools that students from kindergarten through sixth grade receive 220 minutes of religious instruction and chapel every week. However, school exit exams do not have a section on religion. Roman Catholic holy days are routinely observed as school holidays. However, the Constitution prohibits any educational institution from compelling a child to receive religious instruction or to attend any religious ceremony or observance without the child's consent or, if under the age of 18, the consent of the child's parents. This constitutional safeguard is particularly important because most of the country's primary and elementary schools, high schools, and colleges are church-affiliated. There are occasional instances where administrators either do not know the law or misapply it. These are usually corrected through parent-school consultations. In rare cases, the Ministry of Education intervenes to correct the situation.

The Constitution also stipulates that no one shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend services without his or her consent while serving in the armed forces, or while being detained in prison or in any correctional institution. The country's 850 member Defense Force supports one Catholic chaplain but does not restrict the practice of other religions.

Although the Government has oversight authority over the country's lone prison, the institution is managed, and largely financed, by the Kolbe Foundation, a non-denominational Christian nongovernmental organization. Missionaries are active in daily programs at the prison, and at least one lives within the prison compound. Religious conversion is in no way mandatory, but it is part of the primary focus of the prisoner rehabilitation program. Prisoners of any faith may request and receive visits from ministers of their choice.

To help maintain religious harmony, the Constitution reserves the right of the Government to intervene in religious matters “for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons,” including the right to observe and practice any religion “without the unsolicited intervention of members of any other religion.”

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Under the country’s revised Immigration and Nationality Act, foreign religious workers are permitted to enter the country and proselytize; however, they must be registered and purchase a religious worker’s permit. The yearly fee is modest. There is a steady stream of religious workers and missionaries from the United States. In addition to preaching, these visitors are involved in building and renovating schools and churches, providing free medical and dental care, and distributing donated food, clothing, and home fixtures.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious groups occasionally joined forces in ecumenical efforts to distribute goods to the needy, clean up neighborhoods, alert the public to the dangers of promiscuity, fight crime, protect children, and carry out similar endeavors. The Government also occasionally seeks input from a cross-section of the religious community in addressing these issues.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

BOLIVIA

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

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 424,164 square miles, and its population is estimated at 8.3 million. According to a 2001 survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute, 78 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, and Protestant denominations account for 16 to 19 percent of the population. Catholic membership is higher in urban than in rural areas, while Protestant affiliation is highest (approximately 20 percent) in the countryside. Approximately 2.5 percent indicated no religious affiliation, and less than 0.2 percent claimed affiliation with other faiths, including Islam, the Baha’i Faith, Judaism, Buddhism, and Shinto. There are 280 non-Catholic faith-based organizations and more than 200 Catholic groups registered by the Government. Mennonites, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, and several evangelical groups maintain an active foreign missionary pres-

ence. Atheists are estimated to constitute an insignificant percentage of the population.

Between 50 and 60 percent of the population identifies itself as indigenous, belonging to Aymara (estimated at 1.5 million), Quechua (2.4 million), Guarani (77,000), Chiquitano (63,000), or 1 of 20 smaller groups. The indigenous population is higher in rural areas, where the formal Roman Catholic Church tends to be weaker due to a lack of resources and to indigenous cultural resistance to Church efforts to replace traditional attitudes with more orthodox Catholic practices and beliefs. For many individuals, identification with Roman Catholicism for centuries has coexisted with attachment to traditional beliefs and rituals, with a focus on the Pachamama or Mother Earth figure, as well as on Akeko, a traditional indigenous god of luck, harvests, and general abundance, whose festival is celebrated widely on January 24. Some indigenous leaders have sought to discard all forms of Christianity; however, this effort has not led to a significant increase in the number of "indigenous-belief only" worshippers.

Mormons are present throughout the country; Mormon sources estimate the number of their adherents in the country at more than 140,000. The Jewish community is spread throughout the country and has established a synagogue in La Paz. Muslims have cultural centers that also serve as mosques in La Paz, Santa Cruz, and Cochabamba. These cultural centers welcome both Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims. Korean immigrants have their own church in La Paz. The majority of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants have settled in Santa Cruz, where there is a university, founded by Korean immigrants, that has evangelical and Presbyterian ties. There are Buddhist and Shinto communities, as well as a substantial Baha'i community, throughout the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government 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. Roman Catholicism predominates, and the Constitution recognizes it as the official religion. The Roman Catholic Church receives support from the State (approximately 300 priests receive small government stipends), in part to compensate the Church for properties expropriated in the past. The Church exercises a limited degree of political influence through the Bolivian Bishops' Conference.

Four Christian holy days are observed as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Non-Catholic religious organizations, including missionary groups, must register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship and receive authorization ("personeria juridica") for legal religious representation. There were no reports that the Government restricted gatherings of nonregistered religious groups; however, registration is essential to obtain tax, customs, and other legal benefits. The Ministry may not deny legal recognition to any organization based on its articles of faith; however, the procedure typically requires significant legal assistance and can be both costly and time-consuming, which has led some groups to forgo registration and operate informally. Religious groups receiving funds from abroad may enter into a framework agreement ("marco convenio") with the Government that lasts 3 years and permits them to enjoy judicial standing similar to that of other nongovernmental organizations and have tax-free status. Fourteen religious groups, including the Catholic Church, have done so. Members of less prominent religious communities have objected to the Government's lack of understanding regarding the activities and worship of these faiths, which allegedly has resulted in additional delays when attempting to finalize legal registration.

Only Catholic religious instruction is provided in public schools. By law, it is optional and is described as such in curricular materials; however, students face strong peer pressure to participate. Non-Catholic instruction is not available in public schools for students of other faiths. The Government continues to develop an alternate course on "ethics," but it has been challenged recently by political parties in the Congress who view this as a means by which conservative faith-based groups would obtain significant influence over public education.

The Government does not take an active role in promoting interfaith understanding, although it is represented at interfaith meetings. It works with Catholic and Protestant organizations on social and health programs. If the President attends Mass as part of his official functions, it is traditional for all Cabinet members, regardless of their faiths, to accompany him.

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 United States 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, and ecumenical dialogue between various religious groups continued. In 2004, leaders from Muslim, Jewish, Baha'i, Methodist, Catholic, and indigenous communities, the latter representing traditional beliefs, organized several interfaith meetings. These gatherings involved prayer, interfaith worship, and public displays of interfaith cooperation.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials continued to meet regularly with officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, principal religious leaders, and the Papal Nuncio.

BRAZIL

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 3,287,673 square miles, and its population is approximately 182 million. Nearly all major religions and religious organizations are present in the country. Many citizens worship in more than one church or participate in the rituals of more than one religion. The 2000 census indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identify themselves as Roman Catholic, although only a small percentage regularly attend Mass. Approximately 15 percent of the population is Protestant, an estimated 85 percent of who are Pentecostal or evangelical. Evangelical churches have grown rapidly and have challenged the traditional dominance of the Catholic Church. Denominations include the Assemblies of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists account for most of the remaining Protestants and are centered in the south, where the majority of German and northern European immigrants concentrated during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IGBE) counted approximately 427,000 adherents of "Buddhism and other oriental religions." Shintoism is practiced to a limited degree in the Japanese-Brazilian community. There were 27,239 Muslims (a figure that probably undercounts the actual total), 39,840 practitioners of Spiritualism, 10,723 adherents of indigenous traditions, and 2,979 Hindus. An estimated 7 percent did not practice any religion. Approximately 384,000 participants did not respond to the census.

Followers of African and syncretistic religions such as Candomble, Xango, Macumba, and Umbanda constitute an estimated 4 percent of the population. Candomble is the predominant traditional African religion practiced among Afro-

Brazilians. It centers on the worship of African deities brought to the country as a result of the slave trade. Syncretistic forms of African religions that developed in the country include Xango and Macumba, which to varying degrees combine and identify indigenous animist beliefs and Catholic saints with African deities. The capital of Bahia State, Salvador, where most African slaves arrived in the country, is considered the center of Candomble and other traditional African religions. As a result of internal migration during the 20th century, Afro-Brazilian and syncretistic religions have spread throughout the country.

Followers of spiritism, mainly Kardecists—adherents of the doctrine expounded by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the 19th century—constitute approximately 1.3 percent of the population, with 2,337,432 followers, according to the IGBE.

Leaders of the Muslim community estimate that there are between 700,000 and 3 million Muslims, with the lower figure representing those who actively practice their religion, while the higher estimate would include also nominal members. These figures are much higher than the 27,239 Muslims reported in the 2000 census. Muslim leaders have never taken a formal count of the number of Muslims; however, they believe that the official census greatly underestimated the size of their community. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt who arrived during the past 25 years. A recent trend has been the increase in conversions to Islam among non-Arab citizens. There are approximately 55 mosques and Muslim religious centers.

Approximately 101,062 citizens identify themselves as Jewish. There are an estimated 45,000 Jews in Rio de Janeiro and approximately 29,000 in Sao Paulo. Many other cities have smaller Jewish communities.

The following religious holy days are observed as national or regional holidays: Saint Sebastian's Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Saint John's Day, Our Lady of Carmen ("Carmo"), Assumption Day, Our Lady Aparecida, All Souls' Day, Evangelicals Day, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and several evangelical organizations, operate freely throughout the country. The Institute for Religious Studies indicates that there are 2,981 foreign Protestant missionaries and approximately 3,000 foreign Catholic priests 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.

There are no registration requirements for religions or religious groups. There is no favored or state religion, although the Government maintains a concordat with the Vatican. All faiths are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. There is a general provision for access to religious services and counsel in all civil and military establishments. The law prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government restricts the access of nonindigenous persons, including missionaries, to indigenous reserves and requires visitors to seek permission from the National Indian Foundation to enter official indigenous areas.

In August 2004, President Lula signed a petition drafted by the World Jewish Congress to condemn anti-Semitism and call for the U.N. General Assembly to adopt a resolution to denounce anti-Jewish acts. This event marked the first time for a Brazilian president to sign an official declaration against anti-Semitism.

The law makes it illegal to write, edit, publish, or sell books that promote anti-Semitism or racism. The law enables courts to fine or imprison anyone who displays, distributes, or broadcasts anti-Semitic or racist paraphernalia. The law mandates a 2- to 5-year prison term for violators.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, although a natural rivalry exists among various religious groups vying for greater numbers of adherents. The influence of evangelical churches is growing. There is no national ecumenical movement. The National Commission for Religious Dialogue brings together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders.

Anti-Semitism is rare; however, there are signs of increasing violence against Jewish persons. Leaders in the Jewish community expressed concern over the continued appearance of anti-Semitic material on Internet web sites compiled by neo-Nazi and "skinhead" groups. There were no reports of violent incidents directed at Jews, although there were reports of anti-Semitic graffiti, harassment, vandalism, and threats via telephone and e-mail.

On May 8, 2005, three "skinheads" were arrested and charged with attempted murder, gang formation, and racism for attacking three Jewish students in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State; a fourth person was arrested on May 18. At the end of the period covered by this report, the four suspects were in jail and awaiting trial. Police found flags, banners, books, CDs, and other Nazi paraphernalia in the homes of the four men. Police have ordered the preventive arrests of four additional gang members suspected of participating in the beatings.

In October 2004, the Congregation Beth Jacob Synagogue in Campinas, Sao Paulo State, was defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti, including swastikas and the phrase, in English, "kill all jewish." The Campinas city council passed a motion denouncing the act. The police investigation into the incident was closed due to a lack of evidence.

In February 2004, anti-Semitic graffiti was found in a bathroom at Pontificia Universidade Catolica in Rio de Janeiro state (PUC-RJ); six students were under police investigation. PUC-RJ has approximately 10,000 students, 5 percent of whom are Jewish.

No further information was available on the 2003 Supreme Court decision to uphold a 1996 Rio Grande do Sul state court conviction of editor Siegfried Ellwanger for racism. Ellwanger edited and wrote anti-Semitic books. The lower court's ruling sentenced Ellwanger to a prison term of 2 years, although this sentence was converted to 4 years of community service.

There was no reported progress in the investigation of the 2003 shooting death in Sao Paulo of the Vertero Catholic bishop.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

CANADA

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) 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 with the Government ways to promote religious freedom and other human rights throughout the world.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 3,855,101 square miles, and its population is approximately 33 million. While there is no state or dominant religion, an estimated 74.6 percent of the population belongs to Christian denominations or claims Christianity as its religion. Roman Catholics (43 percent of the population) constitute the largest denomination, followed by Protestant denominations (29 percent). United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, and Pentecostal are the largest Protes-

tant groups. Approximately 1.1 percent of the population is Jewish. According to a 2001 government census, the Muslim population increased to 2 percent, double the number recorded 10 years ago. Other religious groups include Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, each with approximately 1 percent of the population. Several other religions, such as Scientology, Baha'i, Shinto, Taoism, and aboriginal spirituality, each account for less than 1 percent. Sixteen percent claimed no religious affiliation, an increase from 12 percent in the 1996 census.

A 2002 poll on religious attitudes by the Pew Research Center found that approximately 21 percent of the population attends church on a weekly basis.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms 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.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government.

The Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protect the rights or privileges possessed by denominational schools at the time of national union in 1867. In practice, this protection has meant that some provinces have funded and continue to fund Catholic school education, and some provinces (such as Quebec) have funded Protestant education.

In May 2005, the Quebec provincial government announced that it would eliminate religious instruction in schools in 2008, replacing Protestant and Catholic teaching with academic instruction on ethical, religious, and cultural matters.

In January 2005, the Quebec government briefly considered an initiative for funding private Jewish schools in the province but discontinued the proposal after strong negative reaction from the media and public. Although it was generally agreed that opposition to the proposal was not based on anti-Semitism, there were some isolated anti-Semitic statements attributed to persons who had opposed the proposal.

On June 11, 2005, the Ontario provincial government announced that it had indefinitely postponed a decision on whether an Islamic Court of Civil Justice could operate in the province. The proposed court, composed of religious scholars, would arbitrate civil cases in accordance with Shari'a. Private arbitration has been permitted in Ontario since 1991 by the Ontario Arbitration Act, and various religious groups have used private arbitration to resolve civil matters. The decision being considered by the Ontario provincial government was whether to bring the current system of private arbitration under the authority of the Ontario Family Law Act, which would give the provincial government greater oversight on these proceedings.

On May 26, 2005, the Quebec provincial legislature gave unanimous support to a motion blocking the use of Shari'a in Quebec. Some Muslim groups in Quebec stated they wanted the right to apply Shari'a to settle family disputes.

The Government has designated certain Christian holy days as national holidays: Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day.

There is no official government council for interfaith dialogue, but the Government provides funding for individual ecumenical projects on a case-by-case basis.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In April 2005, a court in British Columbia ordered a 14-year-old girl, who was a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, to undergo a blood transfusion as part of her treatment for cancer, despite the girl's protest that her religious beliefs did not allow for blood transfusions.

Also in April 2005, lawyers for a 15-year-old Sikh student argued before the Supreme Court that the student's fidelity to the Sikh religion would be broken if the Government forced him to remove a ceremonial dagger concealed beneath his clothes at school. Prosecutors contended that the issue was not one of religious freedom, but rather school violence, and that the dagger could be used to harm other students. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Court had not issued a ruling.

The Alberta Human Rights Commission was considering two complaints of discrimination against homosexuals by the Catholic bishop of Calgary after he publicly declared his opposition to proposed same-sex marriage legislation by the federal Government. The bishop contended that his religious and free speech rights were violated, arguing that he was accused of human rights violations simply for espousing the teachings of his faith.

On June 15, 2005, the Quebec Human Rights Commission ruled that private schools in the province had the same obligation as public schools in the province to make reasonable accommodation for their students' religious beliefs. The decision was in response to a 2003 case, when a private school refused to allow a Muslim girl to wear her hijab (headscarf) at school. Public schools in Quebec had already been required to allow students to wear them.

In June 2004, the Supreme Court ruled on two cases brought by groups in Quebec who claimed that their right to freedom of religion had been restricted unduly by condominium contracts and municipal bylaws. In one case, the Court declared that a condominium association in Montreal could not bar a group of Orthodox Jewish families from constructing temporary sukkah huts on their balconies to celebrate the fall festival of Sukkot. In the second case, the Court ruled that a local municipality could not refuse to rezone land upon which a group of Jehovah's Witnesses wished to build a church hall.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, tensions continued between some members of the Jewish and Islamic communities. The number of anti-Semitic incidents increased during the period covered by this report.

In June 2004, the Government released a pilot survey of hate crime incidents compiled from 12 major Canadian police forces. The survey revealed that of 928 hate crime incidents during 2001 and 2002, religion was the second most common (43 percent) motivation for hate crime, after race or ethnicity (57 percent). Overall, Jews were the number one target of hate crimes, with 25 percent of the incidents, while Muslims ranked third, with 11 percent. The survey also found that 15 percent of all hate crimes during the 2001–02 period were associated by police with the events of September 11, 2001, with 30 percent of that subset involving actions directed against Muslims and 27 percent against Jews.

The B'nai Brith Canada League for Human Rights received 857 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, a 46.7 percent increase compared to 2003. Incidents were reported throughout the country, including for the first time in Nunavut territory. The highest number of reports came from Ontario Province (530 incidents, 405 of which took place in the Greater Toronto area), followed by Quebec Province (204 incidents, 187 of which took place in Montreal); the majority of Jews reside in these two provinces. B'nai Brith also reported significant increases in reports received in Alberta and in the Maritime Provinces, as well as in the cities of Winnipeg and Ottawa. The 857 reports included 457 cases of harassment, 369 cases of vandalism, 31 cases of violence, and 191 cases involving attacks on synagogues or Jewish homes. Jewish students reported 47 cases of anti-Semitic incidents that occurred on campus, including desecration of Jewish symbols, anti-Semitic graffiti, and intimidation of and physical assaults against Jewish students. The B'nai Brith League also noted a marked increase in the number of workers complaining that they were refused time off (whether paid or unpaid) to observe the religious requirements of the Jewish high holidays.

In March 2005, two teachers at an Islamic school in Ottawa were suspended for praising an essay written by a student about avenging the death of one of the founders of the Hamas militant movement. One teacher wrote positively about martyrdom and killing Israeli soldiers, and the other teacher helped with the artwork in the essay. An investigation by the Ontario Province Education Minister concluded that it was an isolated incident and did not reflect the curriculum at the school.

In February 2005, a young male pleaded guilty to the 2002 murder of an Orthodox Jew in Toronto and was sentenced to life imprisonment, without chance of parole for at least 15 years. Although he yelled anti-Semitic obscenities as he committed the murder, the police subsequently determined that the crime was not hate related.

In December 2004, a 19-year-old man pleaded guilty to arson in the April 2004 firebombing of the library of a Jewish elementary school in Montreal.

There were expressions of anti-Muslim sentiment, according to the Canadian chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR-CAN). In June 2005, the organization released a survey supporting its contention that Muslims were being subjected to questionable interrogation practices in national security interviews. CAIR-CAN alleged that young Arab males were being disproportionately targeted for security interviews by the Government and that security officials were using troubling tactics, including discouraging Muslims who were interviewed from having legal representation present.

In May 2005, two charges of promotion of hatred were made against a young male accused of spray-painting "Die Muslim Die" at Ryerson University in Toronto. The incident was one of many reported during the summer and fall of 2004 targeting Muslims, Arabs, and Jews at the school. In addition to the spray-painting incident, other incidents at the school included the distribution of pamphlets threatening the president of the Muslim association, the posting of notices on bulletin boards urging the public to "kill these Islamic infidels," and a letter placed under the door of the Arab and Muslim student offices that said, "Those who follow Islam need to be killed in the worst possible way imaginable."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses with the Government ways to promote religious freedom and other human rights throughout the world.

CHILE

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. A 1999 law, "Norms for the Legal Establishment of Churches and Religious Organizations," commonly known as the "Ley de Cultos," gives other religious entities the same legal status that the Roman Catholic Church enjoys; however, the Catholic Church unofficially retains a privileged position. The Unification Church was denied registration under the 1999 law on the basis that it represented a threat to public order and the family. At the end of the period covered by this report, a Unification Church appeal was pending a Supreme Court hearing.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 292,260 square miles, and its population is just over 15 million. Seventy percent of the population age 14 or older was identified as Roman Catholic by the 2002 census (down from 76.8 percent in 1992).

In the census, the term evangelical refers to all non-Catholic Christian churches with the exception of the Orthodox Church (Greek, Persian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Armenian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 90 percent of evangelicals were Pentecostal. According to the 2002 census, evangelicals totaled 1,699,725 persons, or 15.1 percent of the population over the age of 14 (up from 12.4 percent in 1992).

Other affiliations recorded in the 2002 census were Jehovah's Witnesses (119,455 persons), Mormons (103,735), Jews (14,976), Orthodox Christians (6,959), and Muslims (2,894). All other religions totaled 493,147 persons, or 4.4 percent. Atheists and those "indifferent" regarding religion constituted approximately 8.3 percent (931,990) of the population over the age of 14 (up from 5.8 percent in 1992). Members of the largest faiths are numerous in the capital; and Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, and other evangelical churches also are active in other regions of the country. Jewish communities are located in Santiago, Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepcion, and Iquique (although there is no synagogue in Iquique). Mosques are found in Santiago and Iquique.

Indigenous people make up 5 percent (780,000) of the population. Of this group, 65 percent identify themselves as Roman Catholic, 29 percent as evangelicals, and 6 percent as "other." Mapuche communities, constituting 87 percent of indigenous

citizens, continue to respect traditional religious leaders (Longkos and Machis), and anecdotal information indicates a high degree of syncretism in worship and persistence of traditional healing practices. Many indigenous people consider these cultural rather than religious practices.

The Baha'is are not mentioned in the census; adherents estimate the number of practitioners at 6,000.

Traditional Protestant churches, including Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed Evangelical, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist, are present. There is also a small Buddhist population and a very small number of Unification Church members.

Foreign missionaries operate freely, and many priests are of foreign origin.

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. Church and state are officially separate. The 1999 law on religion ("Ley de Cultos") includes a clause that prohibits religious discrimination; however, the Roman Catholic Church enjoys a privileged status and occasionally receives preferential treatment. In addition to Catholic events, government officials attend major Protestant and Jewish ceremonies. The law allows any religion to obtain legal public right status (comprehensive religious nonprofit status). Under the law, the Ministry of Justice may not refuse to accept a registration petition, although it may object to the petition within 90 days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites for registration have not been satisfied. The petitioner then has 60 days to address objections raised by the Ministry or challenge the Ministry in court. Once a religious entity is registered, the State no longer has the authority to dissolve it by decree. Instead, the semiautonomous Council for the Defense of the State may initiate a judicial review; however, no organization that has registered under the Ley de Cultos has been deregistered.

In addition, the law allows religious entities to adopt a charter and bylaws suited to a religious organization rather than a private corporation. They may set up affiliates (schools, clubs, and sports organizations) without registering them as separate corporations.

As of August 2004, 756 religious groups and related organizations had registered under the new law. Of those, 465 had completed the registration process and gained legal public right status. This number included the Roman Catholic Church, Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, a wide range of Protestant churches (evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Episcopalian), several Buddhist temples, Jewish congregations, Islamic mosques, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The remaining 291 entities had not completed all the requirements for incorporation.

The registration process is often delayed due to the complexities of formulating a new charter and bylaws. Many groups have also delayed registration due to the taxes and fees involved in the transference of property from the old legal entity to the new one. The Ministry of Justice formed a committee that includes representatives of affected organizations to develop a way to avoid payment of the taxes and fees for the initial re-registration.

In addition to Christmas and Good Friday, four Catholic holy days are celebrated as national holidays: Corpus Christi, the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Feast of the Assumption, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The 1999 law on religion grants other religions and denominations the same right that the Catholic Church possesses to have chaplains in public hospitals, prisons, and military units. Hospital regulations continue specifically to permit Roman Catholic chaplains in hospitals, and if requested by a patient, to provide access to chaplains and lay practitioners of other faiths. There are 35 Catholic chapels, 39 paid Catholic chaplains, and more than 1,000 volunteers authorized to conduct religious activities in the prison system. Prison authorities have established two evangelical Christian chaplain positions at a national level, and every prison has designated evangelical Christian pastoral workers. Non-Catholic pastors reported that their access to prisons and hospitals was generally good during the period covered by this report.

The celebration of a Roman Catholic Mass frequently marks public events. If the event is of a military nature, all members of the participating units are obliged to

attend. The military unofficially integrated a number of Protestant and evangelical Christian chaplains, but it continued to block efforts by non-Christian religious groups to provide military chaplains, and as of June 2005, regulations implementing the 1999 law had not been promulgated. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Catholic Church is considered beneficial to a military career, and in the navy, it is said to be almost a requirement for advancement to the highest posts. In 2001, an ecumenical chapel was opened in the Investigative Police Academy, and an evangelical Christian chaplain was appointed. Two ethics instructors at the Academy were evangelical Christian. In 2004, the Ministry of Defense named Catholic and evangelical Christian chaplains and offered regular religious services in a chapel in the ministry.

Religious instruction in public schools is almost exclusively Roman Catholic. Schools are required to offer religious education, on an optional basis, twice a week through middle school. Teaching the creed requested by parents is mandatory; however, enforcement is sometimes lax, and religious education in faiths other than Roman Catholicism is often provided privately through Sunday schools and at other venues. Local school administrations decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. Although curricula are approved for 14 other denominations, 92 percent of public schools and 81 percent of private schools offer instruction based only on the Roman Catholic faith. Evangelical church leaders reported continued resistance by school administrators, based on economic considerations, to appointing evangelical religion teachers in the Santiago suburbs of Quinta Normal and Puente Alto.

In 2003, the Ministry of Justice issued an objection to the registration of the Unification Church, on the basis that the Unification Church's doctrine threatened the constitutional order. On March 30, 2005, a Santiago Appeals Court ruled the Unification Church could be denied legal public right status on grounds that the Church represented a threat to public order and the family. This was the first time under the 1999 law that an organization's registration was contested for other than technical reasons. The Unification Church filed an appeal and, at the end of the period covered by this report, the case was pending a hearing before the Supreme Court.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some discrimination occurred.

Ecumenical groups exist, including the Ecumenical Brotherhood of Chile, bringing together diverse Christian churches; the Abrahamic Forum, bringing together Jews, Christians and Muslims; and the Judeo-Christian Confraternity. These groups organize periodic dialogues to address specific social issues. Universities and seminaries also organize interreligious dialogues and events.

Investigations into the July 2004 killing of Father Faustino Gazziero D'Estefani in the Cathedral of Santiago revealed that satanism was a possible motivation for the attack. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were no further updates on the status of the case.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. Embassy sponsored the training of four military chaplains in the United States in 2004. In addition, Embassy representatives met with a wide range of religious leaders, including Santiago's archbishop and key representatives of evangelical and Jewish organizations. The Embassy also continued to maintain informal contact with representatives and leaders of several other faiths.

COLOMBIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church retains a de facto privileged status.

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 Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) regularly targeted religious leaders and practitioners, killing, kidnapping, extorting, and inhibiting free religious expression. Terrorist organizations generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political rather than religious reasons; guerrillas of these two organizations committed the vast majority of these abuses. Paramilitaries, including the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), occasionally targeted representatives and members of religious organizations.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, although some indigenous leaders reportedly were intolerant of non-syncretistic forms of worship.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 439,735 square miles, and its population is estimated at 42 million. Although the Government does not keep official statistics on religious affiliation, a 2001 poll commissioned by the country's leading newspaper, *El Tiempo*, indicated that the population was 81 percent Roman Catholic. Ten percent identified themselves as nonevangelical Christians and 3.5 percent as evangelicals. Another 1.9 percent professed no religious beliefs. An estimated 60 percent of respondents to the poll reported that they do not practice their faith actively.

According to the Colombian Evangelical Council of Churches (CEDECOL), there are 5 to 6 million evangelical Christians. The Bishops' Conference of the Roman Catholic Church estimated that 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. According to data provided by their respective national headquarters, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses have 180,000, 130,000, and 110,000 members respectively, totaling approximately 1 percent of the population. Other religious faiths and movements with a significant number of adherents include Judaism, estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000, Islam, animism, and various syncretistic belief systems.

Adherents of some religions are concentrated in specific geographic regions. For example, the vast majority of practitioners of syncretistic beliefs that blend Roman Catholicism with elements of African animism are Afro-Colombian residents in the western department of Choco. Jews are concentrated in major cities, Muslims on the Caribbean coast, and adherents of indigenous animistic religions in remote, rural areas. A small Taoist commune exists in a mountainous region of Santander Department.

Jewish leaders estimate that as many as one-third of their community had emigrated by the end of 2000. The principal cause was economic hardship caused by the country's recession, which resulted in increased violence against Jewish businesses. However, since the security situation has improved throughout the past 4 years, it is believed that several members of the community have returned, although specific numbers are not available.

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 specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Constitution states there is no official church or religion, but it adds that the State "is not atheist or agnostic, nor indifferent to Colombians' religious sentiment." Some interpret this to mean that the State unofficially sanctions a privileged position for Roman Catholicism, which was the country's official religion until the adoption of the 1991 Constitution. A 1973 concordat between the Vatican and the Government remains in effect, although some of its articles are now unenforceable because of constitutional provisions on freedom of religion. A 1994 Constitutional

Court decision declared unconstitutional any official government reference to a religious characterization of the country.

The Government extends two different kinds of recognition to religious organizations: recognition as a legal entity (*personeria juridical*) and special public recognition as a religious entity. Although the application process is often lengthy, the Ministry of Interior and Justice readily grants the former recognition; the only legal requirements are submission of a formal request and basic organizational information. In addition, any foreign religious group that wishes to establish a presence must document official recognition by authorities in its home country. The Ministry of Interior and Justice may reject requests that do not comply fully with established requirements or that violate fundamental constitutional rights.

Since 1995, the Ministry of Interior and Justice has approved 776 of the approximately 2,435 applications for special public recognition as a religious entity that it received; an estimated 90 percent of the approvals were for evangelical churches. In cases in which individual churches or schools affiliated with a nationally registered church applied separately for special public recognition, the Government granted those organizations affiliate or associate status. More than 40 churches have asked the Government to sponsor legislation establishing less exacting standards for special public recognition and formally codifying religious freedoms provided for in the Constitution. In response to a Constitutional Court decision, the Human Rights Ombudsman submitted draft legislation to Congress during the period covered by this report. In addition to implementing less exacting standards for special public recognition and formally codifying tax exempt status for non-Roman Catholic churches, the draft legislation calls for limits on the noise levels of worship services and restrictions on the condemnation of homosexuality from the pulpit, while granting municipal governments the authority to close churches that do not comply. Some evangelical churches believed the latter restrictions would limit their freedom of religious expression. Congress had not approved the legislation by the end of the period covered by this report.

Accession to a 1997 public law agreement between the State and non-Roman Catholic religions or denominations is required for such organizations to minister to their adherents in public institutions such as hospitals or prisons, to provide chaplainry services and religious instruction in public schools, and to perform marriages recognized by the State. When deciding whether to grant accession to the 1997 agreement, the Government considers a religion's total membership, its degree of popular acceptance within society, and other relevant factors, such as the content of the organization's statutes and its required behavioral norms. As of the end of the period covered by this report, 13 non-Roman Catholic churches had been granted accession. No non-Christian religious group is a signatory to the 1997 public law agreement. Some prominent non-Christian religious groups, such as the Jewish community, have not sought to accede to the 1997 public law. Many churches that are signatories reported that some local authorities have failed to comply with the accord. The Ministry of Interior and Justice has stated that it reprimands local authorities when it receives complaints of such noncompliance.

The Ministry of Foreign Relations issues visas to foreign missionaries and religious administrators of denominations that have received special public recognition. Foreign missionaries are required to possess a special visa that is valid for a maximum of 2 years. Applicants must have a certificate issued by the Ministry of Interior and Justice confirming that the religion is registered with the Ministry, a certificate issued by the religious organization itself confirming the applicant's membership and explaining the purpose of the proposed sojourn, and proof of economic means. Some evangelical missionaries reported difficulties obtaining visas because some government officials do not recognize their churches as legitimate. The Government permits proselytizing among the indigenous population provided it is welcome and does not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands.

The Constitution recognizes parents' right to choose the type of education their children receive, including religious instruction. It also states that no student shall be forced to receive religious education in public schools. However, the Roman Catholic Church and religious groups that have acceded to the 1997 public law agreement may provide religious instruction in public schools to students who wish to receive it, but students may opt out of sectarian religious instruction. Religious groups that have not acceded to the public law agreement may establish parochial schools, provided they comply with Ministry of Education requirements. For example, the Jewish community operates its own schools.

The Roman Catholic Church has a unique agreement with the Government to provide education in rural areas that have no state-run schools. The schools are tax-exempt.

In 2001, the Supreme Council of the Judiciary ruled that the Colombian Institute of Higher Education, which administers the country's college entrance examination, must provide alternate examination dates for evangelicals whose beliefs preclude them from taking examinations on Sunday. In 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that university instructors could not force students to reveal their religious beliefs or require them to take courses that might obligate them to do so.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although the 1991 Constitution mandated the separation of church and state, the Roman Catholic Church retains a de facto privileged status. Accession to the 1997 public law agreement is required for non-Catholic groups to minister to soldiers, public hospital patients, and prisoners, and to provide religious instruction in public schools. The State recognizes religious marriages celebrated only by the Roman Catholic Church and the 13 non-Roman Catholic churches that are signatories to the 1997 public law agreement. Members of churches that are not signatories to the agreement must first marry in a civil ceremony. Some signatories to the agreement have complained of discrimination at the local level, such as refusal by municipal authorities to recognize marriages performed by these churches. The Ministry of Interior and Justice does not have the authority to recognize a marriage; however, it has the power to investigate claims of discrimination and to reprimand local authorities.

All legally recognized churches, seminaries, monasteries, and convents are exempt from national and local taxes and customs duties. However, some Protestant churches reported that municipal governments required them to pay property and other local taxes. The Ministry of Interior and Justice states that it reprimands local authorities when it receives such complaints. Local governments may exempt religiously affiliated organizations such as schools and libraries. However, according to the Christian Union Movement, an association of evangelical Christian churches, only 10 municipalities have exempted non-Roman Catholic churches from local taxes.

City planning restricts the number of churches in residential areas. Protestant denominations often are forced to locate their churches in commercial and industrial zones, and they have complained that new zoning laws showed de facto favoritism toward Roman Catholicism, since most Roman Catholic cathedrals were constructed before zoning laws were instituted and were therefore exempt from the laws' requirements. Due to its historical presence in the country, the Roman Catholic Church has a large number of churches that are centuries old, some of which are historic monuments, in central locations throughout the country.

In November 2004, a team of prosecutors and investigators raided a small Taoist commune in a mountainous rural region of Santander Department based on information provided by eight former commune members that the commune's leadership was engaged in illegal activities. The commune's leaders claimed the government raid was part of a larger plot to close down the community. However, the capture of Diego Leon Agudelo (or "Saidamandan") on February 21 was key to clarifying the alleged murders and crimes committed by the commune's leaders. Investigators have evidence that Agudelo headed an illegal armed group linked to paramilitary organizations and took orders from Taoist community founder, Luis Gustavo Morales Sierra (or "Kelium Zeus Indeseus"). Seven killings between 1989 and 2004 were believed connected to the group, including that of the main prosecution witness, slain in November 2004. That witness enabled prosecutors to find 10 men and women who testified to suffering rape, extortion, and kidnapping at the hands of Morales and his collaborators.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor United States 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

The FARC, ELN, and AUC have been designated foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. Secretary of State, under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. Terrorist organizations generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political or financial, rather than religious, reasons. Guerrilla groups were responsible for the vast majority of such attacks and threats; the FARC and ELN regularly target religious leaders and practitioners, killing, kidnapping, extorting, and inhibiting free religious expression. The Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office continued to investigate the killings of 31 members of the clergy believed to have been killed because they were outspoken critics of terrorist

organizations. Paramilitaries occasionally targeted representatives and members of religious organizations.

Religious leaders generally chose not to seek government protection because of their pacifist beliefs and fear of retribution from terrorist groups.

The Presidential Program for Human Rights reported that nearly all killings of priests by terrorist groups could be attributed to leftist guerrillas, particularly the FARC. For example, Roman Catholic priest Javier Francisco Montoya, who in December 2004 disappeared in the jungles of Choco, was killed by the FARC on the shores of the Tamana River. Religious authorities reported he was kidnapped as he went to preside over a religious celebration in Novita. Guerrillas reportedly told those looking for him that he was dead. According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Centro Cristiano Para Justicia, Paz y Accion Noviolenta (or Justapaz) and La Comision de Restauracion Vida y Paz, an evangelical Christian NGO, at least 133 evangelical church leaders were killed in the past 4 years. Roman Catholic and Protestant church leaders state that killings of religious leaders in rural communities are generally underreported because of the communities' isolation and fear of retribution. According to the Christian Union Movement, the FARC is responsible for 90 percent of the murders of Protestant religious leaders. Justapaz and CEDECOL claim that violence against evangelical church leaders is committed equally by paramilitaries and guerrillas.

In response to the increased risks faced by church members, more than 750 local security fronts made up of citizens who live close to churches have been organized to protect Roman Catholic priests and officials. The National Police designed the program following the assassination of Monsignor Isaias Duarte Cancino in 2002. This protection plan has not been extended to include other religious groups.

Unknown perpetrators believed to be affiliated with terrorist groups killed a number of religious leaders.

There was no ruling in the criminal trial of FARC commander John Fredy Jimenez and hired gunman Alexander de Jesus Zapata for the 2002 killing of Isaias Duarte, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Cali. In October 2004, paramilitary Jimmy Matutte was sentenced to 32 years in prison for his involvement in the 1999 murder of Catholic priest Jose Luiz Maso and Spanish aid worker Inigo Eguiluz Telleria.

According to CEDECOL, as of September 30, 2004, illegal armed groups had killed 18 evangelical church leaders. The FARC was responsible for 11 of these killings. For example, on September 4, 2004, three suspected FARC guerrillas opened fire during a prayer service in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church of Puerto Asis, Putumayo Department. The gunmen killed 3 persons and injured 14 others, including 2 children. The FARC inhibited the right to free religious expression in areas it controlled, forcing the closure of hundreds of evangelical churches, particularly in the southwestern part of the country.

According to Bogota newspaper *El Tiempo*, FARC guerrillas killed a "Mamo" (top civil and religious authority) of the Arhuaca indigenous group in November 2004. The attack occurred in the La Estacion settlement in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Maria region. Mariano Suarez Chaparro was dragged from his home and killed; however, indigenous leaders stated that he had not been threatened. They attributed the act to the native group's efforts to have their rights recognized by working with the international community and human rights organizations. Local authorities also claimed that the FARC have been pushed into their areas by military offensives, where guerrillas have appropriated the natives' food, animals, and farm produce.

Justapaz reported that on March 28, 2005, a pastor in Cali was killed by two unknown armed youth who broke into his home, physically assaulted him, and fractured his skull. On April 14, 2005, a 10-year-old boy and member of an evangelical church in Toribio, Cauca Department, was killed in a firefight between members of the military and the FARC; 600 church members were hurt, 5 were seriously injured, and 3 places of worship were destroyed in the attack.

Religious leaders and practitioners were the targets of threats and kidnappings, primarily by guerrilla groups.

On July 25, 2004, members of the ELN kidnapped Miscal Vacca, the Roman Catholic bishop of Yopal in Casanare Department. The ELN attempted to justify the kidnapping by claiming it had a political message for him to deliver to the Government. Vacca was released 3 days later following an army rescue operation that cut his captors off from the ELN commanders who allegedly prepared the message. Vacca had been involved in peace efforts among the Government, ELN, and right-wing paramilitary groups in the department.

On April 2, 2005, Cali newspaper *El Pais* reported that suspected FARC members in Choco Department kidnapped five members of the religious organization Justicia

y Paz. A commission made up of representatives of government human rights officers and NGOs went to the area to investigate the disappearance of the five persons working with the peace communities. Vice President Francisco Santos condemned the action and called for their immediate release.

Bogota Caracol Colombian Radio reported that in July 2004, the Roman Catholic Church asked the FARC to clarify whether they were holding priest Cesar Dario Pena, who was kidnapped in March 2004. The bishop of his parish in Santa Rosa de Osos indicated that the guerrillas had in the past accused the priest of maintaining ties to paramilitary groups. At the end of the period covered by this report, efforts to obtain his release had been unsuccessful.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference reported that 63 Catholic churches had been seriously damaged or destroyed in the last decade. Roman Catholic churches generally were not attacked intentionally, but often they were affected by guerrilla attacks on police stations and mayors' offices located nearby.

According to the Christian Union Movement, advances by government security forces against the FARC have resulted in the re-opening of approximately 350 of the more than 450 evangelical churches closed since 2002. However, guerrillas and paramilitaries continued to attack rural evangelical churches and schools because they suspected the churches were fronts for U.S. Government activities. Mormon Church leaders and facilities remained under threat for the same reason.

Due to threats from guerrillas or paramilitaries, many religious authorities were forced to refrain from publicly discussing the country's internal conflict. Illegal armed groups, especially the FARC, threatened or attacked religious officials for opposing the forced recruitment of minors, promoting human rights, assisting internally displaced persons, and discouraging coca cultivation. The Bishops' Catholic Conference also reported that paramilitaries and guerrillas issued death threats against rural priests who spoke out against them. In response to such threats, some religious leaders relocated to other communities.

Guerrillas or paramilitaries harassed some indigenous groups that practice animistic or syncretistic religions. However, such harassment appeared generally motivated by political or economic differences (whether real or perceived), or by questions of land ownership, rather than by religious concerns.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Roman Catholic Church and some evangelical churches reported that some indigenous leaders were intolerant of nonsyncretistic forms of worship.

There were isolated reports of anti-Semitism, including graffiti painted on exterior walls of synagogues and anti-Semitic statements in pamphlets published by small xenophobic organizations. The Government condemned these acts and worked with members of the Jewish community to investigate these incidents.

The Jewish community in the country has taken a number of steps to combat anti-Semitism by advancing dialogue with other religious groups and by holding educational forums on Judaism at Christian churches, private and public schools, and universities.

A number of faith-based NGOs promote human rights, social and economic development, and a negotiated settlement to the country's armed conflict. The most influential of these organizations either are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church or were founded by Roman Catholic Church officials. The Roman Catholic Church continues to be the only institutional presence in many rural areas, and it conducts important social work through its Social Pastoral Agency.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains regular communication with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, other Christian denominations, and other religions.

COSTA RICA

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 problems with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 19,730 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.3 million. A 2004 University of Costa Rica study found that 47 percent of the population identified themselves as practicing Catholics, 25 percent considered themselves nonpracticing Catholics, 13 percent said they were evangelical Protestants, 10 percent reported that they did not have a religion, and 5 percent declared that they belonged to "another religion."

Apart from the dominant Catholic religion, there are several other religions in the country. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has a temple in San Jose that serves as a regional worship center for Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Although they represent less than 1 percent of the population, Jehovah's Witnesses have a strong presence on the Caribbean coast. Seventh-day Adventists operate a university that attracts students from throughout the Caribbean Basin. The Unification Church maintains its continental headquarters for Latin America in San Jose. Non-Christian religions, including Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Hare Krishna, Scientology, Tenrikyo, and the Baha'i Faith, claim membership throughout the country, with the majority of worshippers residing in the Central Valley (the area of the capital). While there is no general correlation between religion and ethnicity, indigenous peoples are more likely to practice animism than other religions.

The country's tradition of tolerance and professed pacifism has attracted many religious groups. Polish Jews found refuge there before and during the Second World War. The mountain community of Monteverde, a popular tourist destination, was founded during the Korean War by Quakers from the United States, acting on their convictions as conscientious objectors. The country also has welcomed Mennonites, Beechy Amish, and other pacifist religious groups. Today's immigrants, mostly Nicaraguans and other Latin Americans, do not generally practice different faiths than those of native-born citizens.

Foreign missionaries and clergy of all denominations work and proselytize freely. Mormons have the most active mission program, with 148 full-time missionaries. Many churches have short-term missions that may last a month or less and can comprise up to 20 persons.

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 provides the right to practice the religion of one's choice, and the Government generally observed and enforced this provision. In the event of a violation of religious freedom, a victim may file a lawsuit with the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court. A victim may also file a motion before the Constitutional Chamber to have a statute or regulation declared unconstitutional. Additionally, a victim may appeal to the Government's administrative court for permission to sue the Government for alleged discriminatory acts. Laws are generally applied and enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion and requires that the State contribute to its maintenance. However, it also prohibits the State from impeding the free exercise of other religions that do not impugn universal morality or proper behavior. In 2003, a group of legislators proposed a motion to remove language in the Constitution which states that Roman Catholicism is the official state religion. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Legislature had not considered the motion.

On April 27, 2005, a private citizen filed a motion before the Constitutional Court alleging that Article 75 of the Constitution, which establishes Roman Catholicism as the official state religion, was unconstitutional because it violated international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Inter-

American Convention on Human Rights. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Constitutional Court had not determined whether to accept the case.

In 2004, the Government eliminated the Catholic Church's annual subsidy from the national budget. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for managing the Government's relationship with the Catholic Church and other religious groups in the country. Other denominations have complained that the Government favors the Catholic Church to the detriment of others.

The law allows for the Government to provide land to the Catholic Church. In some cases, the Government retains ownership of the land but grants the Church free use. In other situations, property simply is donated to the Church. This second method commonly is used to provide land for the construction of local churches; however, these methods do not meet all the needs of the Church, which also buys some land outright. Government-to-Church land transfers are not covered under any blanket legislation. Instead, they are handled by specific legislative action once or twice per year. Some denominations have construed this as favoritism.

Besides notary publics, only officials of the Catholic Church can perform marriages that are automatically recognized by the State. Other religious groups can perform wedding ceremonies, but the marriage must then be legalized via a civil union. Couples may also choose to have only a civil ceremony.

Various Catholic religious holy days are considered national holidays; these include Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Our Lady of Los Angeles (August 2). Christmas is also a national holiday. However, if an individual wishes to observe another religious holy day, the Labor Code provides the necessary flexibility for that observance upon the employer's approval.

The Government does not require religious groups to register, nor does it inhibit the establishment of religious groups through taxation or special licensing requirements for religious organizations. Groups may incorporate to acquire legal status and must have a minimum of 12 members to do so. This is a requirement for any group that seeks to gain legal status, as stipulated in the law governing associations. Also, religious groups, as any other association, must register with the Public Registry of the Justice Department if they are involved in any type of fundraising activity.

According to the General Directorate of Immigration, applications by foreign missionaries seeking permission to work in the country are studied on a case-by-case basis. They may be given a temporary permit that is granted for a maximum, non-renewable term of 6 months. The missionary may enter the country as a tourist and then apply for the permit upon arrival. Alternatively, foreign missionaries may apply for an annually renewable temporary residence. This status is granted by a special migration council that consists of representatives from the Ministries of Public Security, Foreign Affairs, Labor, and Justice. In either case, missionaries must be accredited to an officially recognized church to receive the permit.

Catholic religious instruction is provided in the public schools; however, it is not mandatory. Students may obtain exemptions from this instruction with the permission of their parents. The school director, the student's parents, and the student's teacher must agree on an alternative course of instruction for the exempted student during instruction time. Religious education teachers in public schools must be certified by the Roman Catholic Church Conference, which does not certify teachers from other denominations or faiths. In April 2005, National University requested that the Ministry of Public Education reform the teachers' law to allow teachers who are certified in religious instruction by an entity other than the Catholic Church to teach religion in the public school system. National University provides degrees in religious instruction, but its graduates have difficulties finding employment because the Catholic Church will not certify them. The university alleged that the Catholic Church Conference certification requirement was discriminatory. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Education Ministry had not made a decision.

Private schools are free to offer any religious instruction they choose. Parents do not have the option of homeschooling their children.

Despite the official status of the Catholic Church, the Constitution prohibits clergymen or secular individuals from engaging in political propaganda motivated by religion. There is no prohibition on clergymen or other religious individuals serving in political office; however, the Constitution establishes that the President, Vice President, Cabinet members, and Supreme Court justices may not be members of the clergy. A 2003 government decree facilitates the entry of representatives of all religions to prisons and hospitals to minister to their members.

Foreign missionaries and clergy of all denominations work and proselytize freely. Among the non-Catholic denominations, Mormons have the most active mission program, with 148 full-time missionaries. Many churches have short-term missions that may last a month or less and can comprise up to 20 persons.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Government does not ban or discourage specific religions or religious factions, nor does it restrict organized religions in establishing places of worship. All such applications are submitted to the local municipality and must comply with safety and noise regulations as established by the General Health Law. Several recently established evangelical churches were closed by municipalities, local health departments, or police as a result of noise violations. Representatives from the Evangelical Alliance Federation alleged that the noise pollution claims were baseless and that local officials closed down the churches simply because they did not like them. On March 18, 2005, a Legislative Assembly member who represents a Protestant political party expressed his opposition to the Health Ministry's closures of evangelical churches by climbing the country's national monument and refusing to come down until the Ministry of Health promised to reopen the churches and open an investigation into the noise levels of churches in question. At the end of the period covered by this report, the President's office was working with the Health and Housing Ministries to draft regulations regarding the building codes for places of worship that would apply to all churches, regardless of denomination.

There were no developments in the case of a priest awaiting the Constitutional Court's decision regarding his right to remain in the country after being ordered to leave by the Migration Department, which had determined that he was working without the proper visa.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

In 2003, a priest who was the spokesperson of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops was beaten by a group of unidentified persons. The priest blamed the followers of a breakaway Catholic group, The Queen and Lady of All Creation, for the attack, claiming that it was in retaliation for the Church's decision to disavow the group. At the end of the period covered by this report, a police investigation was in progress.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom problems with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials met with the Archbishop of San Jose and dioceses in the provinces to discuss economic, social, and labor problems and also communicated with other religious leaders and faith-based nongovernmental organizations. The Embassy coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Relations Director of Religion regarding multilateral efforts to ban all forms of human cloning.

CUBA

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the Government continued to place restrictions on freedom of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Overall human rights conditions remained poor in the wake of the Government's jailing of 75 human rights activists and independent journalists in 2003, the biggest such crackdown in more than 2 decades. In general, unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference, harassment, and repression. Some unregistered religious groups were subject to official censure. The Government's policy of permitting apolitical religious ac-

tivity to take place in government-approved sites remained unchanged. However, citizens worshipping in officially sanctioned churches often were subject to surveillance by state security forces, and the Government's efforts to maintain a strong degree of control over religion continued.

There were some tensions among religions, often because some religious groups perceived others to be too close to the Government. Tension within the Pentecostal movement continued due to the establishment of house churches, which some religious groups believed was divisive.

The U.S. Government raised issues of human rights, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials; however, the Government dismissed these concerns. The U.S. Government continued to urge international pressure on the Government to cease its repressive practices.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 68,888 square miles, and its population is approximately 11 million. There is no independent authoritative source on the size or composition of religious institutions and their membership. A 1953 survey indicated that 93 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic. According to more recent information from the U.S.-based Puebla Institute, approximately 40 to 45 percent of the population was believed to identify themselves, at least nominally, with the Roman Catholic Church. A significant number of citizens have participated in or practice Santeria, la regla lucumi, and other syncretistic beliefs that are derived from traditional African religions and Roman Catholicism. Some sources estimate that as much as 70 percent of the population practice Santeria or la regla lucumi, which have their roots in West African traditional religions.

The Baptists, represented in four different conventions, are possibly the largest Protestant denomination, followed closely by the Pentecostal churches, particularly the Assemblies of God. Twenty-two denominations, including Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Methodists, are members of the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC). Most CCC members are officially recognized by the State, although several, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church, are not registered and are recognized only through their membership in the CCC. Another 31 officially recognized denominations, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the small Jewish community, do not belong to the CCC.

Although much of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, since the early 20th century, the country has been heavily influenced by secular attitudes. Catholic Church officials usually estimate that approximately 10 percent of baptized Catholics attend Mass regularly. Membership in Protestant churches is estimated at 500,000 persons. No figures on the number of Pentecostals are available. Jehovah's Witnesses claim more than 80,000 active members. The Seventh-day Adventists claim approximately 30,000 persons. Prior to 2001, church attendance had grown among some denominations and increased substantially at Catholic Church services following the Pope's visit in 1998. For at least 6 to 8 months after the Pope's visit, attendance was at unusually high levels. Attendance has since stabilized at levels lower than the 1999 peak but remains higher than before the visit.

There are approximately 320 Catholic priests, 40 permanent deacons, and 650 nuns in the country, less than half the total prior to 1960. Overall numbers of Church officials are only slightly higher than before the Papal visit, since most new arrivals replaced retiring priests or those whose time of service in the country had ended.

Foreign missionary groups operate in the country through registered churches.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the Government places restrictions on freedom of religion. The Constitution has provided for the separation of church and state since the early 20th century. In 1992, the Constitution was changed, and references to scientific materialism or atheism were removed. The Government does not favor any particular religion or church; however, the Government appears to be most tolerant of those churches that maintain close relations with the State through the CCC.

The Government requires churches and other religious groups to register with the provincial Registry of Associations within the Ministry of Justice to obtain official recognition. Registration procedures require groups to identify where they will carry out their activities, demonstrate that they have the funding for these activities, and

obtain certification from the Registry of Associations that they are not duplicating the activities of a previously registered organization. Registration allows church officials to obtain official permission to travel abroad and receive foreign visitors, receive imported religious literature through the CCC, and meet in officially recognized places of worship. Conversely, members of unregistered religious groups must request exit permits on an individual basis, obtain religious materials through extralegal means, and risk closure of their technically illegal meeting places.

Although no new denominations were registered during the period covered by this report, the Government has tolerated some new religions, such as the Baha'i faith and a small congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). In practice, the Government appears to have halted registration of new denominations; however, no groups were known to have applied for and been denied registration during the period covered by this report.

Along with recognized churches, the Roman Catholic humanitarian organization Caritas, the Masons, human rights groups, and a number of nascent fraternal or professional organizations are the only associations outside the control or influence of the State, the Communist Party, and their mass organizations. The authorities continued to ignore other religious groups' pending applications for legal recognition, thereby subjecting members of such groups to potential charges of illegal association; however, no such charges had been filed by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government has relaxed restrictions on most officially recognized religious denominations. Jehovah's Witnesses, once considered "active religious enemies of the revolution," are allowed to proselytize quietly door-to-door and generally are not subject to overt government harassment; however, there continued to be reports of discrimination in schools and the workplace as well as harassment by local Communist Party and government officials. The Government has authorized small assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses, and in 2003 it allowed a large gathering of approximately 7,000 persons. It has also allowed the opening of a central office in Havana and publication of the group's magazine and other religious literature.

Religious literature and materials must be imported through a registered religious group and can be distributed only to officially recognized religious groups. The CCC controls distribution of Bibles to its members and to other officially recognized denominations. The CCC reported that it has distributed 1.5 million Bibles since 1998. Bibles are distributed among denominations according to the number of members of each church.

Since 1992, the Communist Party has admitted as members persons who openly declare their religious faith.

The Government does not permit religious education in public schools and does not permit the operation of private schools of any kind, including religious schools. The Government has allowed the Catholic Church and Jewish synagogues to offer religious education classes and self-improvement courses on subjects such as computers and foreign languages.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Government led to strong confrontations with institutional churches in the early 1960s. During that period, many church leaders and religious professionals, fearing persecution, left the country. More than 130 Catholic religious workers, including priests, were expelled, and a few served long prison terms. From 1965 to 1967, the Government forced many priests, pastors, and others "who made religion a way of life" into forced labor camps called Military Units to Aid Production (UMAPS), alongside homosexuals, vagrants, and others considered by the regime to be "social scum." The UMAP system ended in 1967; however, over the following 30 years, the Government and the Communist Party systematically discriminated against and marginalized persons who openly professed their faith by excluding them from certain jobs, such as teaching. The Government abandoned its official atheism in the early 1990s; however, by that time most churches had been weakened seriously, and active participation in religious services had fallen drastically.

A 2002 Ministry of the Armed Forces political indoctrination manual describes the Catholic Church as "a decisive instrument for the defense of the colonial and neocolonial regimes that governed our country until the 1959 [revolution]. It is this historical fact which created the conditions for anticlerical sentiment in broad sectors of our society." The same document states that the Catholic Church has resigned itself to the "triumph of the Revolution" and is now focused on using pastoral work and humanitarian assistance to gain new adherents.

The Government's main interaction with religious denominations is through the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party. The Ministry of Interior

continued to engage in efforts to control and monitor the country's religious institutions, including surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of religious professionals and laypersons. In January 2004, an independent journalist interviewed a former Ministry of Interior official who reported widespread government infiltration of civil and religious organizations. The former official reported that Afro-Caribbean religious groups were even more heavily targeted for infiltration than political opposition organizations. Some estimates state that 70 percent of the population practices these religions in some form, and therefore these groups are seen as a more grassroots "threat" to the power and authority of the Government.

During the period covered by this report, the Government allowed 9 foreign priests and 19 religious workers into the country to replace priests and nuns whose residence permits had expired; however, the applications of 60 additional priests and 130 additional nuns remained pending. The Cuban Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) estimates that some applications have been pending for 3 to 4 years, and some names are eventually dropped from the list altogether. A request from the CCCB for the Government to permit 15 Catholic orders to establish a presence, which would greatly expand their capacity for training Catholic seminarians, also was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2003, the Office of Religious Affairs of the Communist Party advised Pablo Fuentes, a Spanish-national Catholic Priest in Havana Province, that the Government would not extend his authorization to remain in the country. Fuentes left the country in September 2003. Earlier in 2003, authorities revoked authorization for Fuentes to hold a procession to mark the feast day of the patron saint of the town of Managua because Fuentes was "politically unreliable," apparently because his religious activities were too visible and therefore were considered controversial by the Government. Following Fuentes' departure from the country, the town of Managua was permitted to hold the procession marking the feast day of the patron saint of Managua in 2004.

Government officials criticized the Catholic Church for refusing to register church and lay group publications with the Ministry of Culture, as required by law of all publications. The CCCB indicated that the Church has declined to register because registration would force it to concede control to the State regarding the content and format of Church publications.

Several Catholic diocese and lay groups publish magazines, including Palabra Nueva of the Archdiocese of Havana and Vitral of the Diocese of Pinar del Rio. The publications are not registered with the Ministry of Culture, as required by law. The Government has not blocked printing or distribution of Catholic magazines; however, the State impedes access to printing equipment by making equipment too costly or placing restrictions on sales. The Government has accused the editor of one religious magazine of subversive behavior for writing about sensitive political and social issues.

In January 2005, the Catholic alternative magazine Espacios ceased publishing. The publishers claimed they had run out of funding and lost local support, but there were rumors that they had succumbed to government pressure regarding the magazine's content. Former Espacios Director Joaquin Bello informed the press that Cardinal Jaime Ortega told him the Church wanted a publication that focused more on events in the religious community and less on socio-political issues.

The law allows for the construction of new churches once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government rarely has authorized construction permits, forcing many churches to seek permits to meet in private homes. Most registered religious groups are granted permission to hold services in private homes. Religious groups also must obtain a permit if they wish to reconstruct and repair existing places of worship. The process of obtaining a permit and purchasing construction materials from government outlets is lengthy and expensive.

The Government does not allow the Catholic Church access to public media, but after the death of Pope John Paul II in April 2005, authorities allowed Archbishop Jaime Ortega to address the nation via a taped message. Fidel Castro mentioned the Pope in a positive vein in several speeches and emphasized the late Pope's anti-consumerism and anti-embargo stances; however, Castro failed to note the Pontiff's anti-communist beliefs.

In November 2004, a delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church visited the country to consecrate the first Russian Orthodox temple in the country. Government media also cast this event as evidence of the Government's religious tolerance.

In January 2004, Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Fidel Castro presided over the consecration in Havana of a church for the small Greek Orthodox community, an event that the government media cast as evidence of the Government's religious tolerance. A government website used a news report covering Patri-

arch Bartholomew's visit as "proof" that Amnesty International's criticism of religious restrictions was a "lie."

Government authorities apparently continued to believe that religious organizations, through their charitable work, undermined the authority of the Communist Party. In November 2004, authorities closed a free day-care center in the Baptist Church of Camajuani, accusing the pastor of inculcating the children with religious ideas that went against the Revolution and claiming the facilities' hygienic conditions were substandard. The authorities then opened a competing facility, which charges parents for its services, 100 yards from the church.

Religious officials are allowed to visit prisoners; however, prison officials sometimes refused visits to certain political prisoners. For a religious visit to take place, the prisoner must submit a written request, and the prison director must grant approval. Some prisoners reported that prison officials ignored repeated written requests for religious visits. In punishment cells, prisoners were denied access to reading materials, including Bibles. Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, a political prisoner released in July 2004, reported that prison authorities denied her access to religious workers during her entire 16-month incarceration. She also stated that prison authorities offered religious services to common prisoners but threatened prisoners who exercised this right with denial of privileges, such as visits and correspondence.

The Government continued to enforce a regulation that prevents any Cuban or joint enterprise (except those with specific authorization) from selling computers, facsimile machines, photocopiers, or other equipment to a church at other than the official—and exorbitant—retail price. Additionally, the Government denies access to the Internet to some religious groups that it deems unreliable. The Government controls the Internet and any group seeking legal access is subject to its controls. The Catholic Church has asked the Government for the past 6 years for permission to have Internet access; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not granted the Church's request.

Members of the armed forces do not attend religious services in uniform, probably to avoid possible reprimand by superiors.

Education is secular, and no religious educational institutions are allowed. Religious instruction in public schools is not permitted.

Churches provide religious education classes to their members. Catholic Church officials report that the number of children attending catechism classes has continued to drop, mostly because of other activities, usually scheduled by local school authorities. There have been no reports of parents being restricted from teaching religion to their children.

In September 2004, members of the First Bethany Baptist Church of Moa, in the Province of Holguin, ended a 74-day hunger strike and sit-in. After 15 years of denying the group's request, the Government had finally granted permission to renovate the church. Before the work was completed, the Government threatened to take over the facility because the renovation was too "opulent" and "stood out" among the decrepit buildings nearby. The Government allowed the work to continue only after more than 900 members protested against the Government's plan.

Church officials have reported cases of religious persons experiencing discrimination because of ignorance or personal prejudice by a local official. Religious persons encounter employment problems in certain professions, such as education. In January 2005, Ismari de Armas, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses from Pinar del Rio, was told she was denied employment in a state-run factory because she was "untrustworthy" due to her religious beliefs.

Religious groups are required to submit a request to the local ruling official of the Communist Party before being allowed to hold processions or events outside of religious buildings. In September 2004, the Government permitted for the seventh consecutive year a procession in connection with Masses in celebration of the feast day of Our Lady of Charity in Havana. A number of religious and other activists participated in the procession. The authorities permitted approximately 50 processions nationwide to mark the feast day of Our Lady of Charity but denied permission to more than a dozen others because they were deemed to be more politically and socially vocal and therefore were not in line with government policy. The Catholic Church has decided to stop requesting permits for processions in areas where they historically have not been permitted.

There were smaller, local processions throughout the provinces during the period covered by this report. In December 2004, for the fourth consecutive year, authorities allowed several evangelical denominations to celebrate a full-day public Christmas program in Santa Clara. The authorities did not allow the organizations to post public signs or announce the celebration on the radio or television. However, in May 2004, authorities forcefully broke up an unauthorized procession of more than 500

persons in the town of Banes, Province of Holguin, which had formed to accompany the image of the Sacred Heart.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government monitors all religious groups, including registered and established institutions. The authorities also monitor church-run publications. Government harassment of private houses of worship continued, with evangelical denominations reporting evictions from houses used for worship. According to CCC officials, most of the private houses of worship closed were unregistered, making them technically illegal. In February 2005, the Government fined members of a Pentecostal congregation in Managua \$24 (600 pesos, twice the average Cuban's monthly salary) for worshipping in a structure built without a permit and threatened to demolish the "illegal" structure. The group had been worshipping at the site for more than 14 years.

The Ministry of the Interior continued to engage in efforts to control and monitor religious activities and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups, religious professionals, and laypersons. There were continued reports that local Communist Party and government officials harassed members of Jehovah's Witnesses; however, church officials reported that the number of such incidents decreased.

State security officials visited some priests and pastors prior to significant religious events, ostensibly to warn them that dissidents were trying to "use the church"; however, some critics claimed that these visits were conducted in an effort to foster mistrust between the churches and human rights or pro-democracy activists. During the period covered by this report, state security agents warned the wives of several political prisoners that they would be arrested if they joined other wives of political prisoners for Mass at Havana's Santa Rita Catholic Church. Ministry of the Interior officers reportedly sat near spouses of political prisoners during Mass to intimidate them. Some of the wives continued to attend Mass together on a weekly basis but said they feared government retaliation against them or against their jailed husbands. In many churches, most noticeably at Santa Rita's, the CCCB indicated that a high number of state security agents continued to attend Mass for the purpose of intimidating spouses of political prisoners. There also were reports that prison officials continued to change the dates and times that wives could telephone their spouses to Sunday morning, thereby forcing the spouses to choose between speaking with their spouses or attending Mass.

In April 2005, Miguel David Tejada Tenorio of the First Baptist Church of Santa Clara reported that officials from the Office of Religious Affairs of the PCC pressured his pastor to remove Tejada from his congregation for his political opposition activities.

Also in April 2005, the Council of the Church of Christ in Villa Clara closed the church in Jose Marti Subdivision and prohibited the pastor, Edelton Villa y Luis Pedraza, from preaching because Villa's wife, Rosario Irene Barata, had met regularly with anti-government opposition groups.

In 2000, a leading editor of one of the Catholic Church's magazines was criticized in a major editorial of the Communist Party's newspaper as a "known counter-revolutionary." In April 2003, the Government described the same Catholic Church magazine as "subversive literature" during the summary trials of 75 political prisoners arrested in March 2003. When the editor traveled to the United States and Europe in November 2004, government officials suggested he might not be allowed to return; however, they did not carry out the threat.

Since 1980, the First Baptist Church of Santa Clara has been allowed to hold bank accounts in hard currency. In 2002, the funds were restricted to use in reconstruction projects. In October 2004, authorities denied the church's application to keep these bank accounts and forced the church to conduct all monetary transactions through the Association of Baptist Conventions of Western Cuba, which is under the control of the Government.

There were reports that independent Santeria priests were pressured to join the government-sanctioned Yoruba Cultural Association.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Most persons who identify themselves as religious define themselves as Roman Catholic, although few attend Mass regularly. Catholicism has remained a major cultural reference since colonial times. After almost 50 years of the current regime, societal attitudes, including those toward religion, are conditioned heavily by the attitude of Fidel Castro and other government and ruling party leaders. The Government's decision to allow, and even provide some support for, the 1998 Papal visit greatly boosted the public perception that espousing religious faith was again acceptable. Fidel Castro further cemented this view, most importantly among Communist Party adherents and government officials, in nationally televised and broadcast speeches in which he claimed disingenuously that the Cuban Revolution had "never" persecuted religious believers.

There were some tensions among religions, often because some religious groups perceived others to be too close to the Government. Tension within the Pentecostal movement continued due to the establishment of house churches, which some churches believed was divisive, and resulted in government action against Pentecostal worshippers. In addition, Pentecostal members of the CCC have complained that the preaching activities of unauthorized foreign missionaries have led some of the members of their churches to establish new denominations without obtaining the required permits.

In June 2004, evangelical pastor Obet Matos Rodriguez claimed unknown persons had thrown eggs at his home and written derogatory graffiti on his walls.

The CCC is the only ecumenical body that is recognized by the Government. It comprises many Protestant, including Pentecostal, denominations and engages in dialogue with the Catholic Church and the Jewish community. The CCC and the Government generally have a mutually supportive relationship.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

U.S. Government policy toward the country is to promote a rapid, peaceful transition to democracy and respect for human rights, including religious freedom, and the U.S. Government encourages the development of civil society, which includes the strengthening of religious institutions. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana continued to maintain regular contact with the various religious leaders and communities and support nongovernmental organization initiatives that aid religious groups. The U.S. Government regularly sought to facilitate travel to and from the country by religious persons as well as delivery of donated goods and materials that in some cases were provided to religious institutions. The U.S. Interests Section continued to raise issues of human rights, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials; however, the Government dismissed these concerns. As in the past, the U.S. Government continuously urged international pressure on the Government to cease its repressive practices, including religious discrimination and harassment.

DOMINICA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 291 square miles, and its population is approximately 70,000. Christianity is the dominant religion, and the Roman Catholic faith claims approximately 61 percent of the population. In recent years, many individuals have joined evangelical churches. According to the 2001 Population and Housing Census, followers of evangelical churches represent 18 percent of the population. Seventh-day Adventists and Methodists represent the next largest denominations, accounting for 6 percent and 3.7 percent of the population respectively.

Followers of minority religions and denominations, which range in number from 1.6 percent to 0.2 percent of the population, include Rastafarians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Anglicans, and Muslims. According to the census, 1.4 percent of the population adheres to "other" religions—including Baptist, Nazarene, Church of Christ, Brethren Christian, and the Baha'i Faith—and 6 percent of the population has no religion. The Muslim community, which consists mostly of foreign students at the Ross Medical School, financed the 2004 construction of a mosque in Portsmouth.

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 is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship; however, the Government maintains a close relationship with the Christian churches. Christian holy days, such as Good Friday, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays. In addition, during the period covered by this report, the Government declared National Repentance and Dedication Day as a new public holiday to be celebrated annually on April 8. The holiday was proposed by the Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches and accepted by the Government, which recognized "the need for a certain level of spiritual consciousness among Dominicans and of the need to work and pray together for Dominica's prosperity."

The public school curriculum includes Christian education, and students are led in prayer during morning assembly. Non-Christian students are not required to participate. There are Catholic, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist schools, and the Government subsidizes teachers' salaries at religiously affiliated schools.

All religious organizations are required to register with the Government. Organizations must register their buildings through an application to the government registrar, and they then must register as nonprofit organizations with the Attorney General. Nonprofit status is outlined in the Companies Act 21 of 1994. Any organization denied permission to register by the Attorney General has the right to apply for judicial review.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In one instance, a Mormon church claimed to have applied for permission in 2003 to operate and proselytize; however, the request had not been approved by the Attorney General's office. Such recognition affects a church's status as a nonprofit organization, its ability to hold public meetings, and the work status of the church's missionaries. The church has pursued the matter through legal channels; however, there was no conclusion by the end of the period covered by this report. According to the church's law firm, the church wrote letters on the matter and met with the Attorney General in April 2004, seeking to rebut unfavorable reports concerning the church that the Attorney General had received from outside sources, including the police. The petition was being reviewed by the new Attorney General, who was appointed in May 2005. The law firm representing the church group expected that permission would be granted for the group to operate in the country.

Adherents of the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, was illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor United States 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Dominica Christian Council and the Dominica Association of Evangelical Churches conduct activities to promote peace, greater mutual under-

standing, and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola and has an area of 18,815 square miles. Its population is estimated at 8.8 million.

The largest religious denomination is the Roman Catholic Church. Traditional Protestants, evangelical Christians (particularly Assemblies of God, Church of God, Baptists, and Pentecostals), Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have a much smaller but generally growing presence. According to Demos 2004, a population survey taken in 2004 by the Center for Political and Social Studies of the Pontifical Catholic Mother and Teacher University and the Center for Social Studies and Demographics, the population was nominally 64.4 percent Roman Catholic and 11.4 percent Protestant (under which category the survey grouped evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and traditional Protestants). In the same study, 22.5 percent of the sample said they had no religion. Demos 2004 also reported that 55.1 percent of respondents considered themselves religiously observant, while 44.3 percent did not practice actively.

There are approximately 300 Jews in the country, 200 of whom are observant. Most Jews live in Santo Domingo, which has a synagogue and a community leader but no ordained rabbi. In Sosua, there is a synagogue for the small Jewish community, descended from the approximately 600 European Jewish refugees resettled in the country during the Second World War. The Government estimates that there are 5,000 Muslims in the country. There is an active Sunni mosque in Santo Domingo, with approximately 100 regular worshippers, and a small, informal Shi'a facility that is used on special occasions. Buddhism and Hinduism are practiced by a few adherents. Many Catholics practice a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santería) or witchcraft (brujería), but because these practices are usually concealed, the number of adherents is unknown.

Organized foreign missionary groups working in the country include Mormons, Mennonites, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other missionaries are non-denominational or affiliated with independent churches.

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. The Government signed a concordat in 1954 with the Vatican, extending to the Catholic Church special privileges not granted to other religious organizations. These include the use of public funds to underwrite some church expenses, such as rehabilitation of church facilities, and a complete waiver of customs duties when importing goods.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government to operate legally. Groups other than the Catholic Church must request exonerations from customs duties from the Office of the Presidency. This process can be lengthy; however, no requests for tax exoneration were denied during the period covered by this report. Evangelical Protestant leaders have regularly urged the Government to provide their churches privileges equivalent to those granted to the Catholic Church. Roman Catholic weddings are the only religious marriage ceremonies that the Government recognizes, although civil unions are legal as well. At the end of the period covered by this report, Congress was considering but had not approved legislation to recognize marriages performed by non-Catholic denominations.

A 2000 law requires that the Bible be read in public schools, but it is not enforced. Private schools are not obliged to include Bible reading among their weekly 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy met with leaders of various religious communities, including those of minority faiths.

ECUADOR

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 109,483 square miles, and the 2001 census estimated its population to be 12.2 million. The General Registry of Religious Entities has registered 1,802 religious groups, churches, societies, Christian fraternities, and foundations.

Together with the armed forces and the Government, the Roman Catholic Church is widely viewed as one of the three pillars of society. The overwhelming majority of the population is at least nominally Catholic. Some groups, particularly indigenous people who live in the mountains, follow a form of Catholicism that combines indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often are venerated in ways similar to indigenous deities.

The combination of poverty, neglect, and syncretistic practices in urban and rural areas created conditions that were conducive to the spread of Protestant missionary and Pentecostal evangelical activity. Southern Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ

of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals have successfully found converts in different regions, particularly among indigenous people in the Sierra provinces of Chimborazo and Pichincha, among persons who practice syncretic religions, and in groups that are marginalized by society. Other popular evangelical groups include the Assembly of God in urban areas and the Church of the Word of God, which is growing rapidly in indigenous areas.

Hundreds of evangelical churches exist, and many of them are not connected with a particular denomination. Some multid denominational Christian groups, such as the Gospel Missionary Union, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Hoy Cristo Jesus Bendice, have been active for many years.

Several groups registered with the Government in very small numbers: Anglicans, Baha'is, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and the Unification Church. Other groups present in small numbers are Muslims, Jews, and adherents of Eastern Orthodox religions. There are also followers of Inti, the traditional Inca sun god, and some atheists.

Organized foreign missionary groups working in the country include Southern Baptists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals. Other missionaries are nondenominational or affiliated with independent churches.

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 grants all citizens and foreigners the right to practice the faith of their choice freely, in public or in private; the only limits are "those proscribed by law to protect and respect the diversity, plurality, security, and rights of others." The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered unless they engage in commercial activity. Religious organizations that do not engage in such activity may still choose to register to obtain a legal identity, which is useful when entering into contracts. Any religious organization wishing to register with the Government must possess a charter and be in nonprofit status, include all names used by the group (to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission), and provide signatures of at least 35 members. In addition, groups must file a petition with the Ministry of Government, using a licensed attorney, and pay a \$54 registration fee.

At the political level, the Government retains strong ties to the Vatican; the Papal Nuncio is the customary dean of the diplomatic corps.

The Government permits missionary activity and public religious expression by all religious groups.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; private schools have complete liberty to provide religious instruction, as do parents in the home. There are no restrictions on publishing religious materials in any language.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

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 discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and civil society as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

EL SALVADOR

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 Constitution specifically recognizes the Roman Catholic Church and grants it legal status.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 8,108 square miles, and its population is estimated at approximately 6.7 million.

The country is predominantly Roman Catholic, with a sizeable Protestant minority. There are also small communities representing Seventh-day Adventist, Jewish, Hare Krishna, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Muslim faiths, among others. A very small minority practices a native religion. According to a 2003 survey by the Technological University Public Opinion Center, approximately 57.1 percent of the population was Roman Catholic. Additionally, 21.2 percent were members of Protestant churches. (Among Protestants, informal church estimates suggest approximately 35 percent are Baptists and members of Assemblies of God.) Jehovah's Witnesses accounted for an estimated 1.9 percent of the population, 0.7 percent were Mormons, 2.3 percent were associated with other churches and religious groups, and 16.8 percent were not affiliated with any religious organization. The predominance of the Catholic Church does not negatively affect the religious freedom of other groups. Several Protestant missionary groups are active.

In a study published April 24, 2005, the leading daily newspaper *La Prensa Grafica* reported that in the last 17 years, the Catholic Church lost 12 percent of its share of population, while the percentage belonging to Protestant sects almost doubled, from approximately 16 to 29 percent. Catholicism has its greatest percentage of adherents (60.8) among those above age 53, and its lowest share (50.1 percent) among those aged 18 to 26. Geographically, Catholicism reaches its highest percentage (circa 67 percent) in the nation's central zone that includes the populous greater San Salvador metropolitan region, while in the westernmost provinces, approximately 42 percent of the population identifies itself as Catholic.

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 states that all persons are equal before the law and prohibits discrimination based on nationality, race, sex, or religion.

The Constitution explicitly recognizes the Roman Catholic Church and grants it legal status. In addition, the law governing nonprofit organizations and foundations states that such groups may register for official status. A religious group is not required to register with the Government but must do so if it wants to formally incorporate. The Civil Code gives equal status to churches as nonprofit foundations. For formal recognition, they must apply through the General Office of Nonprofit Associations and Foundations (DGFASFL) within the Ministry of Governance. Each group must present a constitution and bylaws that describe, among other things, the type of organization, location of offices, goals and principles, requirements for membership, type and function of ruling bodies, and assessments or dues. Before the DGFASFL can certify a group, it must determine that the group's constitution and bylaws do not violate the law. Once certified, the group must publish the DGFASFL approval and its constitution and bylaws in the official government gazette.

The law for nonprofit organizations and foundations charges the Ministry of Governance with registering, regulating, and overseeing the finances of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), non-Catholic churches, and other religious groups. The law specifically exempts unions, cooperatives, and the Catholic Church. During the period covered by this report, the DGFASFL reported 112 requests for new registration; 40 were approved, 70 were pending, and 2 lacked the necessary documentation to be approved.

The regulations implementing the tax law grant tax-exempt status to recognized non-Catholic churches and other religious groups. The regulations also make donations to recognized churches tax-deductible.

A March 1940 law established Holy Week as holidays for public employees, and each year the Legislative Assembly issues a decree establishing Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday as official holidays for the private sector.

Non-Salvadoran nationals seeking to promote actively a church or religion must obtain a special residence visa for religious activities. Visitors to the country are not allowed to proselytize while on a visitor or tourist visa. There were no allegations of difficulties in obtaining visas for religious activities during the period covered by this report.

Public education is secular. Private religious schools operate freely. All private schools, whether religious or secular, must meet the same standards to be approved by the Ministry of Education.

The Constitution requires the President, Cabinet ministers and vice ministers, Supreme Court justices, judges, governors, the Attorney General, the Public Defender, and other senior government officials to be laypersons. In addition, the Electoral Code requires judges of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and members of municipal councils to be laypersons.

The President attended different religious ceremonies to promote interfaith understanding.

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 abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to the free practice of religion. The National Conference of Churches, an interfaith organization created to promote religious tolerance and to coordinate church-sponsored social programs, has been inactive for more than 3 years. In early 2002, discussions began aimed at restarting the organization; however, no action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to maintain a regular dialogue with principal religious leaders, church officers, church-sponsored universities, and NGOs. Additionally, the Embassy sponsored trips to the United States, such as under the International Visitor Program, for church leaders.

GRENADA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Grenada and 2 smaller islands, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, have an area of 133 square miles and a population of slightly more than 100,000. The population is almost entirely of African, East Indian, and European descent. Approximately 93,000 persons live on the island of Grenada, 7,000 on Carriacou, and 900 on Petite Martinique. Roman Catholics account for 64 percent of the population, Anglicans 22 percent, Methodists 3 percent, and Seventh-day Adventists 3 percent. Other denominations include Presbyterian, Church of God, Baptist, and Pentecostal. In the last 2 years, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Mennonites established churches. The major Christian denominations are represented in most towns and villages except on Petite Martinique, where the population is 98 percent Roman Catholic and 2 percent Seventh-day Adventist. There are an estimated 5,000 Rastafarians. There are no mosques, although Muslims, who number approximately 500 including Muslim foreign medical students at St. George's University, congregate at a small religious center. There are an estimated 150 Baha'is.

Members of religious communities do not concentrate in any particular community or area. Well over 60 percent of the population regularly participates in formal religious services, and that percentage rises on major Christian holy days.

Hurricane Ivan damaged 98 percent of the churches on the island on September 7, 2004; 75 percent were severely damaged and 5 percent totally demolished. At the end of the period covered by this report, many churches were holding services under tents and in homes, while most churches, including the largest in St. George's, remained without roofs.

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 prohibits discrimination based on race, place of origin, political opinion, color, creed, or sex, and the Government generally adheres to these provisions. The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship.

Nearly all government officials are Christians. The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

The Government has taken steps to promote interfaith understanding. In January 2004, the Government established the Ministry for Ecclesiastical Relations, which holds monthly meetings to bring together members from Christian and non-Christian groups, including Baha'is, Muslims, and Rastafarians.

The Prime Minister's office is responsible for issuing licenses for religious groups, buildings, and events. Religious groups must register with the Government. They are entitled to some customs exemptions, such as from import taxes on musical instruments.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. During the period covered by this report, there were numerous activities to promote greater understanding between different denominations and religions. The Conference of Churches Grenada, which was created a decade ago, became more active in its attempts to facilitate closer relations among various religious organizations. The Christian Forum for Social Action discusses social issues such as drug use, HIV/AIDS, and other social ills. For Independence Day and Thanksgiving church services, most Christian denominations worship together at ecumenical observances.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

GUATEMALA

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; however, traditional Mayan leaders continued to report discrimination from some nongovernmental sources.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 42,043 square miles, and its population is approximately 12.1 million. Official census data indicates that the country's indigenous population is 43 percent, although unofficial estimates are higher.

Historically, the country was overwhelmingly Catholic. However, in recent decades, Protestant groups have gained a significant number of members. Although there is no accurate census of religious affiliation, some sources estimate that between 50 and 60 percent of the population is Catholic and approximately 40 percent is Protestant, primarily evangelical. Leaders of Mayan spiritual organizations maintain that many indigenous Catholics and some Protestants also practice some form of indigenous spiritual ritual. Other religious groups are represented, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and, primarily in the capital, small communities of Jews and Muslims. Although many persons nominally affiliated with Catholicism or a Protestant denomination do not practice their religion actively, few citizens consider themselves atheists. There are no accurate statistics on church attendance, although various sources report that it is very high in the evangelical community and somewhat lower among Catholics.

The largest Protestant denomination is the Full Gospel Church, followed by the Assembly of God, the Central American Church, and the Prince of Peace Church. Other Protestant denominations include Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopalian, as well as many independent evangelical denominations. U.S. and Latin American Christian missionaries work both in religious and in social capacities, although there are no reliable statistics on their numbers.

Protestant churches historically have been less tolerant of syncretistic practices than the Catholic Church, which, although it does not formally accept the practice of Mayan religious beliefs and practices among Catholics, has tolerated certain traditional Mayan practices that do not conflict with Catholic dogma. Observers maintain that some indigenous members of evangelical churches also secretly practice traditional Mayan rituals.

Catholic and Protestant churches are distributed throughout the country, and their adherents are distributed among all major ethnic groups and political parties.

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; however, the Constitution recognizes explicitly the distinct legal personality of the Catholic Church.

The Government does not establish requirements for religious recognition, nor does it impose registration requirements for religious members to worship together. However, the Government requires religious congregations as well as nonreligious associations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register as legal entities if they wish to transact business. Such legal recognition is necessary, among other things, for a congregation to rent or purchase premises, enter into contracts, and enjoy tax-exempt status. The Government does not charge religious groups a registration fee. Although registered religious entities are legally exempt from taxes, Protestant leaders noted that their churches sometimes were required to pay property taxes by local officials.

The Catholic Church does not have to register as a legal entity; it is so recognized in the Constitution. For non-Catholic congregations, the process for establishing legal status is determined by the Ministry of Government; the requirements do not vary from one denomination to another. A congregation must file a copy of its bylaws and a list of its initial membership with the Ministry. The congregation must have at least 25 initial members, and the bylaws must reflect an intention to pursue religious or spiritual objectives. Applications are rejected only if the organization does not appear to be devoted to a religious objective, appears to be in pursuit of illegal activities, or engages in activities that appear likely to threaten the public order. There were no reports that the Government rejected any group's application during the period covered by this report. However, Protestant leaders report that their churches have found the process lengthy (lasting from 6 months to several years), and they estimate that, due to these difficulties, 8,000 Protestant churches in the country have not yet applied for or completed the process.

According to immigration authorities, foreign missionaries are required to obtain tourist visas, which are issued for renewable periods of 3 months. After renewing their tourist visa once, they may apply for temporary residence. Specific missionary visas are not issued or required.

The Government does not subsidize religious groups, and no groups reported receiving national funding. The Constitution permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. There is no national framework for determining the nature or content of religious instruction in public schools. Accordingly, when provided, such instruction tends to be programmed at the local level. During the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Education consulted with the Catholic Church and Protestant groups on the integration of general values, although not specific religious teachings, into school curricula.

The Government does not have any organized programs to promote interfaith understanding or dialogue. Nonetheless, the Government has sought the support of diverse religious groups for passage of legal statutes on the rights of children and for implementation of health and literacy programs for children. For a number of churches, social projects are the primary forum for interaction with adherents of other faiths.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Some religious leaders were victimized by crime in previous years; however, there was no evidence to suggest that the criminal attacks were related to their religious affiliation or practices. The criminal justice system continued to be very limited in its ability to investigate any crime.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the various religious communities are generally amicable. According to leaders of the Catholic, evangelical Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim communities, complaints from their followers of discrimination based on religion are rare.

Indigenous people historically have been dominated by Ladinos (citizens of mixed European and indigenous descent) and generally have not participated fully in the mainstream of social, economic, and political activity.

Mayan religious leaders continued to note widespread disagreements with evangelical Protestants, and to a lesser extent, charismatic Catholics. Protestant churches historically have been less tolerant of indigenous practices than the Catholic Church, whose approach in many areas of the country is to tolerate traditional practice not directly in conflict with Catholic dogma. During the Spanish colonial period, some Catholic churches were built on sacred Mayan sites. Mayan leaders report that, in a few areas of the country, Catholic priests have forbidden followers of Mayan spirituality access to these sites.

While many members of evangelical congregations are indigenous, some local evangelical leaders have denounced traditional religious practices as "witchcraft" or "devil worship" and have discouraged their indigenous members from being involved with traditional religious practices.

Evangelical Protestant churches are split between a majority group, which strongly opposes ecumenical engagement with other religious traditions, including Roman Catholicism and Mayan religious practices, and a minority group, which actively promotes an ecumenical and multicultural viewpoint.

The ecumenical movement is focused on discussion of social questions rather than interfaith discourse. For several years, representatives of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and traditional Mayan spirituality have participated in the Inter-religious Dialogue and the Foro Guatemala (the former meets every 2 to 3 months, the latter irregularly) to communicate primarily on social and political issues.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met on many occasions with leaders of major religious institutions as well as religious-based NGOs. The United States supports bilingual education based on the Mayan worldview, including core spiritual values for indigenous children. A U.S. Government grant also supports the Commission against Discrimination and Racism, which broadly fights discrimination against the indigenous population. The Embassy has promoted dialogue between leaders of Mayan and Ladino groups within civil society and within diverse religious communities, and it also has sponsored ecumenical events focused on the role of religion in the construction of peace.

GUYANA

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.

Despite ethnic tensions, the generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 83,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 749,000. The country is religiously and ethnically diverse. Nearly half of the population traces its ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, and more than one-third

of the population is of African descent. These two ethnicities, along with smaller native South American groups and persons of European and Chinese descent, practice a wide range of religions.

Official statistics on religious affiliation were not available; however, various sources estimate that approximately 42 percent of the population is Christian, including the following faiths: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 35 percent is Hindu, and an estimated 8 percent is Muslim (both Sunni and Shi'a). Eleven percent practices beliefs that are grouped into an "other" category, including Baha'ism, Rastafarianism, and Judaism. Approximately 3 percent of the population does not profess any religion.

Members of all ethnic groups are well represented in all religious groups, with two exceptions—almost all Hindus are Indo-Guyanese, and nearly all Rastafarians are Afro-Guyanese. Foreign missionaries from a wide range of denominations are present.

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.

Members of all faiths are allowed to worship freely. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion, and the Government practices no form of religious favoritism or discrimination.

Beginning in 2003, the Government (as a means to increase revenue) began enforcing a law requiring all persons residing in the country continuously for 183 days or more in a 12-month period to pay income tax, even for income derived from outside the country. This law also applies to missionaries. However, missionaries are allowed to put their salaries derived from overseas into escrow accounts overseas to avoid paying the high Guyanese income tax and instead receive a maintenance stipend from the church. Missionaries can receive authorization from the Guyana Revenue Authority to be exempt from paying taxes on their stipends. According to the Government, the motivation for the enforcement of this tax requirement was not to limit missionary activity, nor is it applied in a discriminatory manner.

The Government recognizes religious groups of all faiths present in the country. All churches are required to register with the Government to receive formal recognition. Registration is done under the Companies Act, although in the past, some groups were registered under the Friendly and Benevolent Society Act. Religious groups seeking to establish operations require permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs before commencing their activities. This permission does not allow access to the interior; for such access, all nonofficial persons not resident in the interior require special permission from the Ministries of Home Affairs and of Amerindian Affairs. The ministries review the scope of proposed activities submitted by a religious body and grant approval on a case-by-case basis. There is no formal monitoring of religious groups.

The following holy days are national holidays: Christian—Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas; Hindu—Phagway and Diwali; Muslim—the Prophet Muhammed's Birthday and Eid Al-Adha.

Both public and religiously affiliated schools exist, and parents are free to send their children to the school of their choice without sanction or restriction. The Government imposes no requirements regarding religion for any official or nonofficial purposes.

The Government has promoted cooperation among religious communities to address long-standing racial tensions. In early 2004, the President announced that the Government would provide financial support, including no-cost spectrum on the radio frequency band, for an all-faith television station; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, no proposal from religious bodies to participate had been submitted. The Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), a nongovernmental umbrella organization for Christian, Hindu, and Muslim organizations, has been mandated to work out the modalities for establishing such a station. The IRO's activities are very limited due to infrequent meetings, and not all denominations are represented in its voluntary membership. At the end of the period covered by this report, the IRO had not submitted a proposal to the Government.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Guyana Defense Force (GDF) does not have a chaplaincy; however, efforts are made to coordinate with civilian religious groups to provide personnel with access to religious services. Leaders of all major faiths provide prayer and counseling, although generally only Christian sermons are given on GDF bases. Attendance at religious services depends on the discretion of individual commanders, although in many cases it is mandatory. Membership in a particular religion does not confer any advantage or disadvantage; however, general military practice tends to be biased in favor of Christians. For example, no allowance is made for Muslim observance of Friday as a special prayer day. Also, no provision is made for Hindu dietary preferences.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Although significant problems exist between the country's two main ethnic groups, tensions are generally racially, not religiously based. Religious leaders frequently have worked together to attempt to bridge these differences.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officials met on numerous occasions with leaders of religious groups and with foreign missionaries. The Embassy continued to pursue a policy of active engagement with the Islamic community. The Ambassador and other Embassy officials spoke before various religious groups promoting religious and racial harmony.

HAITI

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles, and its estimated population is 7 to 8 million.

While precise statistics are unavailable, an estimated 50 to 55 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, a decrease from the roughly 80 percent who traditionally were Catholic. The number of Protestants is growing steadily; there are 425 registered congregations, and the largest denominations are Baptist and Pentecostal. Other significant groups include Methodists, Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and Orthodox Christians. There also are many nondenominational Christian congregations. Other non-Christian groups, all small in size, include Jews, Muslims, Rastafarians, and Baha'is.

Voodoo (vodun), a traditional religion derived in part from West African beliefs, is practiced alongside Christianity (most commonly with Catholicism) by a large segment of the population, although no official statistics on the number of adherents are available. The Government officially recognized voodoo as a religion in 2003; however, it continues to be frowned upon by elite, conservative Catholics and by Protestants. The Government provides no legal status for voodoo except for its recognition as a legitimate religious practice.

Some Protestant and Catholic clergy are politically active. One Protestant pastor leads the Christian Movement for a New Haiti (MÓCHRENA) political party, and another leads the National Union of Christians for the Renovation of Haiti (UNCRH) political party. Several Catholic priests remain among the leadership of the Fanmi Lavalas (FL) party of former President Jean Bertrand Aristide, who is himself a former Roman Catholic priest. The Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Protestant Federation occasionally issue statements on political matters.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that practices do not disturb law and order, 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 1987 Constitution grants freedom of religion and directs the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. Under the interim Government, religious affairs fall under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cults (Religious Affairs). The Bureau of Religious Affairs within that ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries. Recognition by the bureau affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects churches' tax-exempt status, and extends civil recognition to church documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Requirements for registration with the Bureau of Religious Affairs include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a list of members of the religious organization, and a list of social projects of the organization. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations are registered with the ministry. Registered religious groups are required to submit an annual report of their activities to the bureau. Many nondenominational Christian groups and voodoo practitioners have not sought official status; however, there were no reports of any instance in which this requirement hampered the operation of a religious group. According to the Government, many groups—Christian and voodoo—do not seek official recognition simply because they are not well developed or organized.

Goods brought into the country for use by registered churches and missionaries are exempted from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Some church organizations have complained that customs officials sometimes refused to honor a church's tax-exempt status; however, it appeared that these refusals generally were attempts by corrupt officials to extort bribes rather than to limit religious practices.

For many years, Roman Catholicism was the official religion of the country. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 Constitution, neither the Government nor the Holy See has renounced the 1860 concordat, which continues to serve as the basis for relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the State and the operation of Catholic religious orders. In many respects, Roman Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religions. Official and quasi-official functions are held in Catholic churches and cathedrals, such as "Te Deum" Masses for Independence Day, Flag Day, and Founders Day. However, in the past several years, the Government has recognized the growing role of Protestant churches. For example, Protestant and Episcopal clergy and voodoo practitioners are now invited to participate when the religious sector is asked to play an advisory role in politics.

The following holy days are observed officially as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Many foreign missionaries are affiliated with U.S.-based denominations or individual churches. Others are associated with independent, nondenominational Christian groups. Missionary groups operate hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics throughout the country. According to a 2004 survey, 83 religious groups send temporary missions on a regular basis to participate in relief and humanitarian activities.

Foreign missionaries enter on regular tourist visas and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to register with the Bureau of Religious Affairs. While some missionaries were concerned by the slowness of the Gov-

ernment to issue residence permits, there was no indication that the delay was due to obstructionism.

The Constitution stipulates that persons cannot be required to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions. Therefore, in Catholic or Protestant parochial schools, the school authorities may not permit proselytization on behalf of the church with which they are affiliated. Parents have been quick to complain and publicize isolated instances in which this principle has been violated. There were no such instances during the period covered by this report.

Only 15 percent of schools are public. In 9 percent of these schools, Catholic and other clergy play a role in teaching and administration. Church-run schools and hospitals are subject to oversight by the Ministries of Education and of Health, respectively.

The Government does not interfere with the operation of radio and other media affiliated with religious groups. In addition to the many radio stations operated by religious (mostly Protestant, including evangelical) groups, religious programming is a staple of commercial broadcasting.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religion plays a prominent role in society. Many citizens display a keen interest in religious matters and freely express their religious beliefs. While society generally is tolerant of the variety of religious practices that flourish, Christian attitudes toward voodoo vary. Many Christians accept voodoo as part of the country's culture; however, others regard it as incompatible with Christianity. This difference in views has led to isolated instances of conflict in the recent past; however, no such instances were reported during the period covered by this report. The Bureau of Religious Affairs has managed periodic tension between some Protestant and voodoo groups effectively. The bureau maintains offices in the central, northern, and southern areas of the country. Tensions between Protestant and voodoo groups are local in nature and usually involve land disputes or conflicts over proselytizing. In some cases, the bureau sends representatives to assist local authorities in settling such disputes. The parties in conflict usually accept the ministry's mediating role.

Ecumenical organizations exist. Interfaith cooperation is perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools.

Particularly in rural areas, accusations of sorcery have been known to lead to mob violence resulting in deaths. Women generally are targeted in these cases, which usually are precipitated by the death of a child from unknown causes. In view of the prevalence of voodoo in rural areas, it appears likely that voodoo practitioners are targeted in some of these cases, although no examples were reported during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their cooperation in the political process. The Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Protestant Federation, and the Episcopal Church each have a seat on the Provisional Electoral Council, with which the Embassy worked regularly as it prepared for elections scheduled for the fall of 2005.

HONDURAS

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 43,278 square miles, and its population is approximately 7 million. An estimated 90 percent of the population is mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), with small numbers of Amerindians and persons of European, African, Asian, and Arab descent making up the rest.

There are no reliable government statistics on the distribution of membership in churches. The Roman Catholic Church reports a total membership of slightly more than 80 percent of the population. In a 2002 survey, the Le Vote Harris reported that 63 percent of respondents identified themselves as Catholics, 23 percent as evangelical Christians, and 14 percent as "other" or provided no answer. Anecdotal evidence and unreleased poll results suggest that the number of Protestant, including evangelical, Christians appears to be growing. The principal faiths include Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant churches. The most prominent evangelical churches include the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission churches. The National Association of Evangelical Pastors represents the evangelical leadership. There are significant numbers of Christian missionaries from the United States. There are small numbers of Muslims and Jews. There is a mosque and a synagogue in San Pedro Sula and a synagogue in Tegucigalpa.

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. However, the armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. The Government consults with the Catholic Church and occasionally appoints Catholic leaders to quasi-official commissions on key issues of mutual concern, such as anticorruption initiatives.

The Government has designated the Christian holy days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas as national holidays.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. The Constitution grants the President the power to grant "juridical personality" to associations, including religious organizations. This status is a prerequisite to being accorded certain rights and privileges, such as tax exemptions. Associations are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group of leaders from the Evangelical Fraternity of Churches for review. This group has the power to suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications also are referred to the Solicitor General's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The President signs the approved resolutions granting juridical personality. There were no reports that the Ministry of Government and Justice turned down any such application submitted by a religious group during the period covered by this report. The Catholic Church and other recognized religious organizations are accorded tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty on imports.

The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. The Ministry generally grants such permits.

There are both religious schools that provide professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provide general education, such as paro-

chial schools. They receive no special treatment from the Government, nor do they face any restrictions.

The law allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud. There were no known cases of deportation under this law during the period covered by this report.

The Catholic Church is seeking the return of former properties of historic interest confiscated by the Government at independence in 1825; however, the Church has not submitted a formal request to the Government.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In 2000, the Congress adopted a controversial measure requiring that, beginning in 2001, all school classes begin with 10 minutes of readings from the Bible. However, at the end of the period covered by this report, the legislation had not been put into effect.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic Church has designated the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the Archbishop has established an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue section within his archdiocese. There were reports of discriminatory popular attitudes against persons of Arab descent, both first-generation immigrants and those whose families have resided in the country for generations. These attitudes occasionally resulted in negative media coverage of Islam and in unsubstantiated public statements by government officials linking Arab citizens to terrorist activities; this occurred in spite of the fact that most Arabs in the country are Christian.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also maintains a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.

JAMAICA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 4,244 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.7 million. According to the 2001 census, the population's religious affiliation is: Church of God 24 percent, Seventh-day Adventist 11 percent, Baptist 7 percent, Pentecostal 10 percent, Anglican 4 percent, Roman Catholic 2 percent, United Church 2 percent, Methodist 2 percent, Jehovah's Witnesses 2 percent, Moravian 1 percent, Brethren 1 percent, unstated 3 percent, and "other" 10 percent. The cat-

egory “other” included 24,020 Rastafarians, an estimated 5,000 Muslims, 1,453 Hindus, approximately 350 Jews, and 279 Baha’is. Twenty-one percent claimed no religious affiliation.

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.

Parliament may freely act to recognize a religious group; however, registration is not mandatory. Recognized groups receive tax-exempt status and other privileges, such as the right of their clergy to visit members in prison.

Religious schools are not subject to any special restrictions, nor do they receive special treatment from the Government. Most religious schools are affiliated with either the Roman Catholic Church or with Protestant denominations; there also is at least one Jewish school.

Foreign missionaries are subject to no restrictions other than the same immigration controls that govern other foreign visitors.

The Christian holy days of Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Government recognizes Rastafarianism as a religion. Members of the Rastafarian community continued to complain that law enforcement officials unfairly target them; however, it is not clear whether the police actions reflect religious discrimination or are due to the group’s illegal use of marijuana, which is an element of Rastafarian religious practice. In 2003, a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on marijuana recommended decriminalization of possession of small quantities for adult personal use in private. At the end of the period covered by this report, the committee’s recommendations had not been considered by the full 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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The country has a well-established tradition of religious tolerance and diversity. In the past, members of the Rastafarian community reported isolated incidents of discrimination against them in schools and the workplace; however, no specific cases of discrimination were documented during the period covered by this report. Local media outlets provide a forum for extensive, open coverage and debate on matters of religion.

In April 2005, the Ministry of Education pulled from primary schools a religious textbook that, according to government lawyers, discriminated against Rastafarians. The book, used at the grade five level, included an illustration of a Rastafarian man, dressed in a red, yellow, and green tam, grabbing a woman’s handbag and running away. The caption read “Rasta committing a crime.” The book was pulled from schools after a review by education officials, who deemed it offensive, unauthorized, and unconstitutional.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

MEXICO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions at the local level in certain areas.

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 Federal Government continued to strengthen efforts to promote interfaith understanding and dialogue and to mediate cases of religious intolerance.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, in certain southern areas, political, cultural, and religious tensions continued to limit the free practice of religion within some communities. Most such incidents occurred in the State of Chiapas, but government officials, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the evangelical and Catholic churches agree the roots of these conflicts sometimes lie in political, ethnic, or land disputes.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,220,663 square miles, and its population is approximately 98 million.

According to the Government's 2000 census, approximately 88 percent of respondents identified themselves as at least nominally Roman Catholic. There are an estimated 11,000 Roman Catholic churches and 14,000 ordained Catholic priests and nuns. An additional estimated 90,000 laypersons work in the Catholic Church system.

Other religious groups for which the 2000 census provided estimates include: evangelicals (includes Pentecostals, Neopentecostals and Pentecostal Roots, which in turn include Live God Church, Truth Column and Support, and the World's Light), with 1.71 percent of the population; other Protestant evangelical groups, 2.79 percent; members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1.25 percent; "historical" Protestants (defined by the Government as Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Del Nazareno, Mennonites, and others), 0.71 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 0.58 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 0.25 percent; Jews, 0.05 percent; and other religions, 0.31 percent. Approximately 3.52 percent of respondents indicated "no religion," and 0.86 percent did not specify a religion.

There are no definitive estimates on membership in various Protestant denominations. A 2000 press report indicated that Presbyterians account for 1 percent of the total population; Anglicans 0.1 percent; Baptists 0.1 percent; Methodists 0.04 percent; and Lutherans 0.01 percent. Official figures sometimes differed from membership claims of religious groups. For example, the Seventh-day Adventist Church claims a nationwide membership of 600,000 to 700,000 persons; however, according to the 2000 census, only 488,945 persons identified themselves as such. Also according to the 2000 census, 205,229 persons identified themselves as Mormons. Some Protestant evangelical groups claim that their coreligionists constitute close to 60 percent of the population in Chiapas; however, in the 2000 census, only 21.9 percent of respondents in that state identified themselves as Protestant. The exact number of evangelical and Protestant churches and pastors is unknown, but at the end of the period covered by this report, the Director for Religious Affairs of the Federal Secretariat of Government (DAR) had registered 3,209 evangelical and 75 Protestant associations.

Non-Catholic Christians are concentrated primarily in the south. Chiapas State, with a large indigenous population and overall approximately 4 percent of the country's population, has the largest percentage of non-Catholics, 36.2 percent, compared to the national average, estimated at 12 percent. Non-Catholics represent 29.6 percent of the population of Tabasco State, followed by Campeche State with 28.7 percent, and Quintana Roo State with 26.8 percent.

There is a small Muslim population in the city of Torreon, Coahuila, and there are an estimated 300 Muslims in the San Cristobal de las Casas area in Chiapas. This group is composed of Mayan indigenous people who converted through the Mission for Dawa in Mexico, an Islamic group recently founded by Spanish missionaries.

Some indigenous people in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatan practice a syncretistic religion that mixes Catholic and pre-Hispanic Mayan religious beliefs.

In some communities, particularly in the south, there is a correlation between politics and religion. A small number of local leaders often reportedly manipulate reli-

gious tensions in their communities for their own political or economic benefit, particularly in Chiapas (see Sections II and III).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Federal Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. State and municipal governments generally protect this right, but some local officials, particularly in the south, infringed on religious freedom, using religion as a pretext for conflicts that are related to political, ethnic, or land issues.

The Constitution states that all persons are free to profess their chosen religious belief and to practice its ceremonies and acts of worship. Congress may not enact laws that establish or prohibit any religion. The Constitution also provides for the separation of church and state. The 1992 Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship defines the administrative remedies that protect the right to religious freedom. In 2001, a provision was added to the Constitution that establishes, for the first time, a prohibition against any form of discrimination, including discrimination against persons on the basis of religion.

To operate legally, religious associations must register with the DAR. The registration process is routine. The most recent statistics show that 6,373 religious associations are registered, of which the vast majority are evangelical Protestant or Roman Catholic. During the period covered by this report, the DAR registered 126 associations, some of which had applied for registration previously. In addition, 201 applications either awaited further supporting documentation or were not in compliance with registration criteria at the end of the period covered by this report.

To be registered as a religious association, a group must articulate its fundamental doctrines and religious beliefs, not be organized primarily for profit, and not promote acts that are physically harmful or dangerous to its members. Religious groups must be registered to apply for official building permits, receive tax exemptions, and hold religious meetings outside of their places of worship.

In April 2005, an organization had its registry revoked by the DAR for changing its statutes by adopting the worship of the “Saint of Death.” The group, known as MEX–USA, was a traditionalist Catholic group that broke away from the Catholic Church and registered with the DAR as a Catholic organization following the Catholic faith. However, it later incorporated members who worshipped “the Saint of Death” (Santa Muerte), and the group began worshipping this saint as its primary deity. This resulted in protests from the Catholic Church, leading to the DAR investigation and the registry revocation. This was the first revocation since the establishment of the Law of Religious Associations. According to the DAR, the revocation was legal, since the group changed the statutes under which it had registered itself. DAR stated that MEX–USA could apply for a new registration.

Another association registered with the DAR, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (IURD), was fined for profiting from its activities. In January 2005, the media reported that the IURD was asking persons for donations of the equivalent of approximately \$1,000, \$5,000, or \$10,000 to receive salvation. The DAR investigated, concluded that IURD was profiting from its activities, and in April fined it the equivalent of approximately \$20,000.

The DAR promotes religious tolerance and investigates cases of religious intolerance. All religious associations have equal access to the DAR for registering complaints. Its officials generally are responsive and helpful in mediating disputes among religious communities. When parties present a religious dispute to the DAR, it attempts to mediate a solution. If mediation fails, the parties may submit the problem to the DAR for binding arbitration. If the parties do not agree to this procedure, one or the other may elect to seek judicial redress. Municipal and state officials generally are responsive and helpful in mediating disputes among communities. However, when a mediated solution cannot be found, officials have not always been aggressive in pursuing legal remedies against offending local leaders (see Section III).

Five states—Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Veracruz, and Mexico State—have their own under secretaries for religious affairs. The Governor of Nuevo Leon has expanded the position of Under Secretary for Citizens’ Services to include Religious Affairs as part of the Under Secretary’s portfolio.

Historically, tensions existed between the Roman Catholic Church and the post-1910 modern state. Consequently, severe restrictions on the rights of the Church and members of the clergy were written into the Constitution. In 1992, the Government reestablished diplomatic relations with the Holy See and lifted almost all restrictions on the Catholic Church. The latter action included granting all religious

groups legal status, conceding them limited property rights, and lifting restrictions on the number of priests in the country. However, the law continues to mandate a strict separation of church and state. The Constitution still bars members of the clergy from holding public office, advocating partisan political views, supporting political candidates, or opposing the laws or institutions of the state. The work of ministers in public institutions such as jails or hospitals is neither explicitly prohibited nor supported by law.

The Constitution provides that public education must be secular. Religious associations, however, are free to maintain private schools. Primary-level home schooling for religious reasons is not explicitly prohibited or supported by the law; however, to enter a secondary school, one must have attended an accredited primary school. Home schooling is allowed at the secondary level once schooling at an accredited primary school has been completed.

Religious associations must notify the Government of their intent to hold a religious meeting outside of a licensed place of worship. The Government received 5,760 such notifications from July 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005.

The Government requires religious groups to apply for a permit to construct new buildings or to convert existing buildings into houses of worship. The latest statistics available showed that the Government granted permits for 1,239 buildings between July 1, 2004, and June 30, 2005. For 453 pending applications, the Government had requested additional information pertaining to the structure or to its proposed use. Religious groups reported no difficulty in obtaining government permission for these activities.

Since 2001, the Secretary of Government has engaged in dialogue with representatives of various religions and denominations to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Missionaries representing a wide variety of groups are present. Although the Federal Government limits the number of visas each religious group is allowed, the application procedure is routine and uncomplicated. The Government has granted 49,466 such visas since 1995, including 6,213 between July 1, 2004, and June 30, 2005.

Of nine official holidays, two are associated with Christian holy days (Good Friday and Christmas Day). In addition, most employers give holiday leave on Holy Thursday, All Souls' Day, Virgin of Guadalupe Day, and Christmas Eve.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Catholic Church occasionally makes comments on national politics. The most recent were in April 2005, when Church officials called for stripping Mexico City Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of his immunity, and in May 2005, when Cardinal Norberto Rivera issued calls for peace and civility in the 2006 national elections.

According to the Religious Associations and Public Worship Law, religious groups may not own or administer broadcast radio or television stations. Government permission is required to transmit religious programming on commercial broadcast radio or television, and permission is granted routinely. From July 1, 2004, to June 30, 2005, authorities approved 7,391 transmissions.

Any religious building constructed after 1992 is the property of the religious association that built it. All religious buildings erected before 1992 are classified as national patrimony and owned by the State. There were reportedly 90,879 buildings dedicated to religious activities as of July 2001. Of those, 80,846 were the property of the State and 10,033 belonged to religious groups. As of March 2005, 13,479 belonged to religious groups.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Federal Government generally respects religious freedom in practice; however, poor enforcement mechanisms have allowed local authorities in Chiapas to discriminate against persons based on their religious beliefs. Federal and local governments often failed to punish those responsible for acts of religiously motivated violence. In parts of Chiapas, leaders of indigenous communities sometimes regard evangelical groups and Catholic lay catechists as unwelcome outside influences and as potential economic and political threats. As a result, these leaders sometimes acquiesced in or ordered the harassment or expulsion of individuals belonging chiefly to Protestant evangelical groups. Between July 2004 and June 2005, the Office of Religious Affairs in the Interior Ministry received eight complaints of such harassment (see Section III). Religious differences often were the cited feature of such incidents; however, ethnic differences, land disputes, and struggles over local political and economic power frequently were the underlying causes. In past years, expulsions involved burning of homes and crops, beatings, and, occasionally, killings. During the period covered by this report, there were no known deaths in incidents that

had a religious dimension. These incidents usually occurred in predominantly Catholic-Mayan communities, and they mostly involved Catholics harassing or abusing evangelicals or other Protestants. On several occasions, village officials imposed sanctions on evangelicals for resisting participation in community festivals or refusing to work on Saturdays.

The Chiapas-based Evangelical Commission for the Defense of Human Rights (CEDEH) claims that municipal authorities have expelled 30,000 persons from their communities in the last 30 years. Some of these persons were displaced at least partly on religious grounds. A representative from the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) reported that there are no official statistics on the displaced. However, the Diagnostic on Human Rights in Mexico, published in October 2003 by the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, cited religious conflict as one of the principal reasons for internal displacement in Chiapas.

In March 2005, Catholics in the community of Paste, Zinacantan municipality, Chiapas, refused to admit Protestant children to schools, and the water supply was cut off for 90 Protestant families (approximately 300 persons) in the same community. Also, Catholics stated they would not allow four Protestant taxi drivers to continue their profession. State government officials in Chiapas summoned Zinacantan Mayor Antonio de la Cruz and other municipal officials to a meeting in San Cristobal de las Casas, in which they resolved the conflict. At the end of the period covered by this report, there had been no further acts against Protestants in the community.

A mob that included local officials linked to the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), armed with sticks, stones, and machetes, drove seven Protestant families from their homes in June 2004 because the families asked local officials to ensure that their freedom of worship be respected. The families joined approximately 300 to 400 Tojolabal Christians expelled from their farms in Las Margaritas Township in the previous 10 months. Another attack warning was issued by the Nuevo Matzan village council, which ordered 15 evangelical families to abandon their homes or face severe consequences. At the end of the period covered by this report, government officials in Chiapas had taken no action, claiming that the families left of their own volition (see Section III).

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there continued to be cases of alleged religious intolerance and expulsions from certain indigenous communities. This was particularly common in Chiapas, where many residents follow unique and centuries-old syncretistic (Catholic-Mayan) religious practices and beliefs. Syncretistic practices are not merely an extension of religious belief but also the basis for the social and cultural life of the community. Therefore, other religious practices are perceived not only as different and strange but also as threats to indigenous culture. In some southern indigenous communities, abandoning syncretistic practices for Protestant beliefs is perceived as a threat to the community's unique identity. Endemic poverty, land tenure disputes, and lack of educational opportunities also contribute to tensions in many communities, which at times result in violence.

The most common incidents of intolerance related to traditional community celebrations. Protestant evangelicals often resist making financial donations demanded by community norms that go partly to local celebrations of Catholic religious holidays, and they resist participating in festivals involving alcohol. News reports estimate that 10,000 evangelical Christians live in segregated areas surrounding San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas.

There was no further information on investigations or arrests regarding the 2003 killing of evangelical Christian pastor Mariano Diaz Mendez, near the town of San Juan Chamula in Chiapas, or of Jairo Solis Lopez, another pastor, who was killed earlier in the Chiapas municipality of Mapastepec.

In Chiapas, traditionalist local leaders have denied approximately 150 children access to the local public schools in 6 indigenous communities every year since 1994

because they are evangelicals. They receive instruction in separate classrooms under a program that began in 2001 to provide education for children who are marginalized due to their religious affiliation.

In July 2004, 15 evangelical indigenous persons accused of being witches were expelled by Tzeltal Indians of the Matzan community in Chiapas. The persons who were expelled filed a complaint with the Deputy Attorney's Office of Indian Justice. No further information was available at the end of the period covered by this report.

In September 2004, the DAR reported that there were 18 conflicts related to religious intolerance in the country. The DAR has stated that since the beginning of the Fox administration in 2000, 79 such conflicts have been resolved. Government officials, the national human rights ombudsman, and interfaith groups continued to conduct discussions about incidents of intolerance to promote social peace. An Interfaith Council includes representatives from the Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Mormon, Lutheran, other Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh Dharma, and Sufi Islam communities.

During the period covered by this report, the Jewish community in the country encountered no violence, harassment, or vandalism. There were occasional protests due to the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, but the Government acted quickly and proactively to offer protection. In 2003, both houses of the Congress unanimously passed the Federal Law for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination. The fourth article of the law explicitly mentions anti-Semitism as a form of discrimination.

In 2004, the head of CNDH criticized harassment of indigenous people who had converted to Islam, primarily in the area of San Cristobal in Chiapas; he attributed the harassment in part to reaction against increased Muslim proselytizing. CNDH initiated an investigation after receiving complaints that federal authorities discriminated against followers of Islam and, in January 2004, considered the matter closed.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives met with government officials, staff of NGOs, and members of religious groups to discuss issues of religious freedom. In October 2004, Embassy representatives traveled to Chiapas and met with state and local officials, religious leaders, and NGO members to discuss religious freedom specifically and the overall human rights situation in the state.

NICARAGUA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 49,998 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.4 million. More than 90 percent of the population belongs to Christian denominations. According to the most recent census, conducted in 1995, 72.9 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, 15.1 percent was evangelical, 1.5 percent belonged to the Moravian Church, and 0.1 percent was Episcopalian. Another 1.9 percent of persons surveyed were associated with other religious groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Amish and Mennonite communities, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 8.5 percent professed no religious affiliation or were atheists. The Episcopal Church claims a membership nearly twice that indicated in the census, and evangelical churches also have made credible claims of higher current membership ranging between 20 and 30 percent of the population. According to a March 2005 countrywide poll of 1,281 citizens, 57 percent of respondents were Catholic, 29 percent were members of evangelical or Protestant

churches, 3 percent belonged to other denominations, and 11 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

Non-Christian communities are few and small. The Jewish community counts less than 50 persons (including expatriates). They gather for religious holidays and Sabbath dinners but do not have an ordained rabbi or a synagogue.

There are approximately 200 Muslims, who are primarily resident aliens or naturalized citizens from Iran, Libya, and Palestine who immigrated in the 1980s. There is a mosque in Managua, the capital, with approximately 100 members. Minority religions also include the Baha'i faith and the Church of Scientology.

Other immigrant groups include "Turcos," Palestinian Christians whose ancestors came to Central America in the early 1900s, and Chinese, who either arrived as Christians or frequently intermarried with citizens and converted to Christianity.

There are no longer any pre-Columbian religions, although there is a "freedom movement" within some Moravian churches to allow indigenous Amerindian spiritual expression, often through music. The Catholic Church frequently incorporates syncretistic elements and does not criticize or interfere with non-Christian aspects of religious festivals held in its name. For example, each August up to 30,000 persons, many of them painted red or coated in motor oil, gather to carry "Dominguito," a sacred 10-inch statue of Saint Dominic, from his home church in a suburb of Managua to another church downtown. One week later, the revelers reconvene to carry the statue back. Such events have historical roots dating to pre-Colombian times.

Moravian and Episcopal communities are concentrated on the Atlantic coast, while Catholic and evangelical churches dominate the Pacific and central regions. There is a strong correlation between ethnicity and religion; blacks and Amerindians, who generally live along the Atlantic coast, are more likely to belong to the Moravian or Episcopal Church. Some evangelical churches have focused on the remote towns of the central South Atlantic Region and have a strong presence there.

Evangelical churches are growing rapidly, particularly in poor or remote areas. For example, in 1980 the Assemblies of God had 80 churches and fewer than 5,000 members. According to Church leader Saturnino Cerrato, as of April 2005, there were more than 860 churches and 200,000 baptized members. The evangelical churches operate two private universities without interference from the Government.

Anecdotal evidence points to proportionally higher church attendance among members of the new evangelical churches than in Catholic and traditional Protestant churches. In poorer neighborhoods, the small evangelical churches are filled to capacity nearly every evening. According to a Catholic official, the Catholic Church is growing numerically but losing ground proportionally.

Foreign missionaries are active. The Mormons have 187 missionaries and 33,000 members in the country, and the Mennonites have a handful of missionary families and close to 5,000 members, mostly in the central Boaco region and rural areas around Waslala in the north. Nearly all of the non-Catholic denominations have at least one missionary family present.

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 also states that no one "shall be obligated by coercive measures to declare their ideology or beliefs." The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.

There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church enjoys a close relationship with the Government. It is the most politically active religious denomination and has significant political influence. Catholic Church leaders routinely meet with senior government officials. There are allegations that state funds have been used to support purely religious Catholic Church activities; however, under the current administration the Government and Catholic Church have maintained more distant relations. The historical position of the Church is such that most religiously affiliated monuments, memorials, and holidays are Catholic-related. However, the dominance of the Catholic Church does not have a negative effect on the religious freedom of others.

Evangelicals are free to be politically active and have formed a political party called Partido Camino Cristiano, or Christian Path Party. The party has 3 legislators in the 92-member National Assembly, including an ordained evangelical minister.

The Government's requirements for legal recognition of a religious group are similar to requirements for other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). A church must apply for "Personeria Juridica" (legal standing), which the National Assembly must approve. Following approval, a church must register with the Ministry of Government as an association or a foundation. Groups that do not register cannot obtain tax-exempt status and technically do not have standing to incur legal obligations and make contracts. However, a number of groups have not registered and continue to operate without penalty.

A recognized church may be granted tax-exempt status, known as exoneration. Because of perceived unequal treatment for different religious groups, exoneration is a contentious issue. This is particularly true with regard to exemption from customs duties on imported goods donated for humanitarian purposes. Goods donated to established churches and other nonprofit religious organizations recognized by the Government that are intended for the exclusive use of the church or organization are eligible for exoneration. Groups must receive clearance from the Office of External Cooperation, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs Office, and the municipality in which the donated goods would be used before a tax exemption is approved and the goods are released.

In the past, some churches and other nonprofit religious organizations, among them the Assemblies of God, reported bureaucratic delays in obtaining customs exemptions, and some complained that the Catholic Church received preferential treatment and did not face the same requirements applied to other religious and humanitarian organizations. However, some Catholic groups, including Catholic Relief Services, reported similar bureaucratic problems in obtaining customs exemptions. In 2003, the National Assembly approved a tax equity law that attempted to streamline the exoneration process. Under the law, all groups were required to requalify for exoneration. Many churches and other nonprofit religious organizations reported that the new law generally streamlined the exoneration process in practice; however, some maintained that the Catholic Church still received preferential treatment and did not have to carry out the same requirements as other religious and humanitarian organizations.

In 2002, the Government closed down radio station La Poderosa when it determined that its license, held by the Commission for the Promotion of the Archdiocese (COPROSA), was invalid because COPROSA had not completed the requirements to register with the Ministry of Government as an NGO. La Poderosa made broadcasts in which hosts and callers made physical threats against President Bolanos and other public officials. Other media and some political leaders criticized the closing of La Poderosa and stressed the need for media to follow ethical standards and engage in better self-regulation.

Missionaries do not face special entry requirements other than obtaining religious worker visas, which are routinely provided. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of difficulties in obtaining religious worker visas. However, the process takes several months and must be completed before the missionary arrives.

Religion is not taught in public schools; however, private religious schools operate in the country. The Government provides financial support to a number of Catholic primary and secondary schools by paying teacher salaries.

The following holy days are recognized as national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. The Festival of Santo Domingo (August 1 and 10) is also celebrated; however, these are holidays only in Managua.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Relations among religions differ between the two coasts. On the Atlantic side, where the three dominant churches are the Moravian, Episcopal, and Catholic, there is an ecumenical spirit; the churches even are known to celebrate the Eucharist (Communion) together. However, on the Pacific side, ecumenism is rare, and there is continuing and energetic competition for adherents between the Catholic and evangelical churches.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy continued to maintain a regular dialogue with the principal religious leaders and organizations.

PANAMA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, with some qualifications, 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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 30,193 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.2 million. According to the most recent official government estimate (1998), 82 percent of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic and 10 percent as evangelical Christian. A 2003 Cid-Gallup poll indicated that approximately 24 percent of the adult population was evangelical Christian. Smaller religious groups include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) with an estimated 16,000 members, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Episcopalians with between 5,000 and 9,000 members, Jewish and Muslim communities with approximately 10,000 members each, Hindus, Buddhists, and other Christians. The Baha'is maintain one of the world's seven Baha'i Houses of Worship in the country. Indigenous religions include Ibeorgun (among Kuna) and Mamatata (among Ngobe).

Members of the Catholic faith are found throughout the country and at all levels of society. Evangelical Christians also are dispersed geographically and are becoming more prominent in society. The mainstream Protestant denominations, which include Southern Baptist Convention and other Baptist congregations, United Methodist, Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas, and Lutheran, derive their membership from the Antillean black and the expatriate communities, both of which are concentrated in Panama and Colon provinces. The Jewish community is concentrated largely in Panama City. Muslims live primarily in Panama City and Colon, with small but growing concentrations in David and other provincial cities. The vast majority of Muslims are of Lebanese, Palestinian, or Indian descent.

Many religious organizations have foreign religious workers in the country. The Mormon Church has the largest number (155). Lutherans, the Southern Baptist Convention, and Seventh-day Adventists each have a much smaller number of missionaries; many are from other Latin American countries.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that "Christian morality and public order" are respected, 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.

Catholicism enjoys certain state-sanctioned advantages over other faiths. The Constitution recognizes Roman Catholicism as "the religion of the majority" of citizens, but it does not designate the Roman Catholic Church as the official state religion. The Constitution dictates that Catholicism be taught in public schools; how-

ever, parents have the right to exempt their children from religious instruction. The numerical predominance of Catholicism and the consideration given to it in the Constitution generally have not prejudiced other religions.

The Constitution provides that religious associations have “juridical capacity” and are free to manage and administer their property within the limits prescribed by law, the same as other “juridical persons.” The Ministry of Government and Justice grants “juridical personality” through a relatively simple and transparent process that does not appear to prejudice any religious organizations. Juridical personality allows a religious group to apply for all tax benefits available to nonprofit organizations. There were no reported cases of religious organizations being denied juridical personality or the associated tax benefits.

Most foreign religious workers are granted temporary 3-month missionary worker visas upon submitting required paperwork, which includes an AIDS test and a police certificate of good conduct. A 1-year extension customarily is granted with the submission of additional documentation, but one religious group complained that the extension can take up to 4 months. Foreign missionaries who intend to remain longer than 15 months must repeat the entire application process. Such additional extensions usually are granted. Catholic priests and nuns and Jewish rabbis are eligible for a special 5-year visa.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Constitution limits the type of public offices that religious leaders may hold to those related to social assistance, education, or scientific research.

In March 2005, the Ombudsman’s Office began mediating the complaint of a Rastafari child denied access to public school because he refused to cut his hair.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic Church, despite losing membership through increasing conversions to evangelical and other Christian denominations, generally has not reacted defensively. Similarly, most Protestant groups are not strongly anti-Catholic. The Jewish community has generally harmonious relationships with other faiths.

Christian denominations, including the Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Salvation Army churches, participate in a successful ecumenical movement directed by the nongovernmental Panamanian Ecumenical Committee. The committee members also have an interreligious committee that includes Jewish Reform, Islamic, Buddhist, Baha’i, Hindu, and Ibeorgun faiths. The Ecumenical Committee sponsors interreligious conferences to discuss matters of faith and practice, and it plans joint liturgical celebrations and charitable projects. The committee also is a member of the Panamanian Civil Society Assembly, an umbrella group of civic organizations that conducts informal governmental oversight and has been the driving force behind ethical pacts on the treatment of women and youth, civil society, responsible journalism, and decentralization.

Over the last decade, local religious leaders have become more outspoken in the ongoing debate on corruption. Evangelical leaders and adherents have sought an increased role in the country’s politics.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy increased its outreach efforts to the Muslim community by visiting community leaders outside of Panama City. The Embassy also increased its outreach to indigenous religious groups by meeting with the Kuna Cultural Congress in Kuna Yala.

PARAGUAY

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 157,047 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.2 million (2004 estimate).

According to the Government's 2002 national census, the population is 89.6 percent Catholic, 6.2 percent evangelical Christian, 1.1 percent other Christian, 0.6 percent indigenous religions, 0.3 percent other (non-Christian) religions; 1.1 percent of respondents claimed no religious preference, and 1.0 percent did not provide information regarding their religious preference.

There are active Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Jewish (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform congregations), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Baha'i communities. There is an Islamic community concentrated in the Department of Alto Parana, an area that experienced substantial immigration from the Middle East, particularly from Lebanon. There is also a substantial Mennonite community, principally in the western Department of Boqueron.

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 and other laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion.

All religious groups must be registered with the Ministry of the Interior. The criteria for recognition consist of completing required paperwork, certification as a non-profit organization, financial and criminal background checks, and payment of a small fee. The Government enforces few controls on religious groups, and there are many unregistered churches. The latter are typically small, Christian evangelical churches with only a few members.

The Government is secular. Most government officials are Catholic. Adherence to a particular creed confers no legal advantage or disadvantage, and foreign and local missionaries proselytize freely. The Government does not take any particular steps to promote interfaith understanding.

The following religious holy days are also official national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15), Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (December 8), and Christmas. The Government also observed the death of Pope John Paul II as a public holiday on the day of his funeral.

The country's armed forces have an extensive Roman Catholic chaplain program. The Catholic Church considers this chaplaincy as a diocese and appoints a bishop to oversee the program on a full-time basis.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. While there is no large-scale ecumenical movement in the country, all religious groups freely exercise their beliefs in a largely tolerant environment. The Catholic Church operates without interference and is permitted to play a visible role in state functions. For example, the Catholic Church often performs Mass at government functions without controversy. Evangelical and other Protestant churches engage in marches and prayer vigils, and part of the Jewish community holds a large public menorah lighting every year for Hanukkah. Protestant evangelical groups, such as the Assemblies of God, and Mormons conduct missionary activities without governmental or societal interference.

The Catholic Church is involved in politics at the fringe, mostly in socio-economic matters, and does not support any political party. The Church freely criticizes the Government. The Church is somewhat protective of its leading role in public life. On several occasions, politicians and the media criticized President Nicanor Duarte Frutos, a nominal Catholic who attends the Raices Mennonite Church, based on his religious preference. For example, the President was widely criticized for his decision not to attend the funeral of Pope John Paul II in Vatican City, although he later attended the installation of Pope Benedict XVI. However, there is a popular belief that Mennonites are ideal public servants because they transpose their honesty and efficient industry to government. On several occasions, President Duarte criticized the Catholic hierarchy, accusing it of bias against his administration.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and Embassy officials met regularly with representatives of different religious groups.

PERU

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 496,225 square miles, and its population is approximately 27.9 million. Among the major religious communities are the Roman Catholic, various Protestant denominations (including Baptists, Anglican, Assembly of God, and many others), Seventh-day Adventist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish, Baha'i, Hare Krishna, and Muslim. There also are indigenous communities practicing various forms of pre-Columbian and syncretistic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, as well as a unique and well-organized local faith, the Israelites of the New Universal Pact. The Cuanto Institute, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), estimates that 80 percent of the population identifies itself as Roman Catholic, although the Catholic NGO Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) estimates that only 15 percent of Roman Catholics regularly attend weekly church services. The memberships of most faiths remain at fairly constant levels; however, various evangelical Christian denominations have rapidly increasing congregations. According to some estimates, in the last 20 years, their representation has grown from 2 to 3 percent of the population to 10 to 15 percent.

Using the 1993 census information (the most recent available), the National Statistics Institute (INEI) estimates that Protestants, the majority of whom are evangelical or Pentecostal, constitute 7.2 percent of the population. This likely underreports the size of this rapidly expanding group. The National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimates that evangelicals represent 12 percent of the population. The INEI estimate for evangelicals also includes nonevangelical groups such as the Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. INEI estimates that adher-

ents of non-Christian faiths account for approximately 2.5 percent of the population, while agnostics and atheists constitute 1.4 percent. Historically, evangelicals resided in areas outside of Lima, the capital, and in rural rather than urban areas; however, in the last 15 years, their numbers in urban areas have increased significantly. There are small Jewish populations in Lima and Cuzco and small Muslim populations in Lima (mostly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (predominantly of Pakistani origin).

Some Catholics combine indigenous worship with Catholic traditions. This type of syncretistic religion is practiced most often in the Andean mountain highlands. Indigenous peoples in the remote eastern jungles also practice traditional faiths. The founder of the Israelites of the New Universal Pact (not connected to Israel or the Jewish faith) organized the group in 1960 in Junin Department; most adherents are concentrated in and near Lima.

Foreign missionary groups, including Mormons and several evangelical organizations, operate freely throughout the country, although they do not receive the same treatment in the areas of customs, immigration, and taxation that is given to the Catholic 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. Article 50 of the Constitution establishes separation of church and state but recognizes the Catholic Church's role as "an important element in the historical, cultural, and moral development of the nation." The Government acts independently of Catholic Church policy. Nonetheless, it maintains a close relationship with the Church, and a concordat signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. Non-Catholic critics complain that the concordat was executed between the Vatican and the last military government and thus does not reflect the current democratic vision of equality. Officials of the Church sometimes play a high profile role in the public sector.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion; however, preferential treatment is given to the Catholic Church in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas. This has continued to raise concerns about unequal treatment of non-Catholics engaged in similar activities.

The Executive Branch regulates religious affairs through the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry issues resolutions that implement laws, and historically the Ministry interacted with the public through an office of relations with the Catholic Church. In 2002, the Ministry established a second Religious Affairs office for non-Catholic religions. Both offices maintain a continuing dialogue with the Catholic Church and a coalition of all other religions to reform the resolution that requires registration by all religious groups.

In 2004, the Ministry of Justice promulgated a regulation designed to enhance religious freedom and equality by providing for the registration of churches so that they may receive official status; however, this registration process has provoked controversy. Some evangelical Christian churches complain that the Government makes it difficult for them to register because new, independent churches continue to be founded, while government regulations require that a church be operating for several years before it can register. In addition, because many evangelical churches do not have central lines of authority and lack sufficient doctrinal similarities for the Government to group them together, evangelical organizations complain that the current registration process requires each individual evangelical church to register as a separate religion. At the end of the period covered by this report, evangelical groups were in negotiations with the Ministry of Justice to revise the regulations to permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru, to register their member churches as one group. Other groups that are more hierarchical and longer established support strict registration requirements as a deterrent to fraudulent or misleading registrations.

All faiths are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize, but contrary to past practice, religious denominations or churches are now required to register with the Government. The primary function of the Religious Affairs Unit in the Ministry of Justice is to process complaints of religious discrimination. This unit also serves to ensure that all faith groups receive certain financial benefits, such as exemption from some import taxes and customs duties beyond the historic preferences granted to the Catholic Church. During the period covered by this report, the unit did not receive any discrimination complaints; however, the existence of the office was not widely known or publicized outside of Lima.

Conversion from one religion to another is respected, and missionaries are allowed to enter the country and proselytize without following any special procedures. Some non-Catholic missionary groups claim that the law discriminates against them by taxing religious materials, including Bibles, that they bring into the country, while the Catholic Church has not been taxed on such items. Reform of the church registration resolution was designed to remove this discrimination.

Roman Catholicism, the Catholic Church, and Catholic clergy receive preferential treatment and tangible benefits from the State in the areas of education, taxation of personal income, remuneration, and taxation of institutional property. All work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops are exempt from income taxes. Real estate, buildings, and houses owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction) must pay property taxes for schools and clergy residences. Some Catholic clergy receive state remuneration in addition to the stipends paid to them by the Catholic Church. This applies to the country's 52 bishops as well as priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the country's borders. In addition, each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government. According to Catholic Church officials, none of these payments are substantial. However, the Freedom of Conscience Institute (PROLIBCO), an NGO that favors strict separation of church and state and opposes the preferential treatment accorded to the Catholic Church, claims that the financial subsidies and tax benefits are far more widespread and lucrative than publicly acknowledged. Some groups complain that Catholic bishops, for example, receive government expense allowances of approximately \$3,000 (9,900 soles) per month for which the bishops do not have to account.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Catholic charities do not have to pay customs duties; however, non-Catholics with extensive charitable activities complain that donations of goods from abroad are taxed at commercial rates. Ongoing registration reform is designed to allow duty-free import of charitable goods, but at the end of the period covered by this report, it was unclear how the Ministry of Justice-driven registration reform would be applied to the customs service.

Immigration discrimination against missionaries or clergy from non-Catholic faiths is frequently cited as impinging on religious freedom. Residency documents show an immigrating Catholic priest to be in a "Religious-Catholic" category, but there is no category for non-Catholic religious officials. As a result, clergy or missionaries from other faiths go through a lengthy immigration process that Catholics are exempt from, including a requirement to leave the country every 6 months and reapply for a visa. There were no reports that non-Catholic clergy were denied admission because of their religious status. At the end of the period covered by this report, religious groups, the congressional committee on religion, and the Ministry of Justice were working to add a category for "Non-Catholic Religious Worker" to immigration regulations.

The General Education Law mandates that all schools, public and private, impart religious education as part of the curriculum throughout the education process (primary and secondary), "without violating the freedom of conscience of the student, parents, or teachers." Catholicism is the only religion taught in public schools. Many non-Catholic parochial or secular private schools have been granted exemptions from this requirement. The Education Ministry has made it mandatory for public school authorities to appoint religious education teachers upon individual recommendations and approval by the presiding bishop of the area. The major complaint of non-Catholic organizations is that although their adherents may be exempted from attending Catholic instruction, the students who do so lose academic credits. Students who graduate from primary and secondary schools without these credits cannot be at the top of their class regardless of other academic achievements they attain. These students are then disadvantaged in competitions for scholarships or for admission to universities with competitive entry requirements.

Parents who do not wish their public school children to participate in the mandatory religion classes must request an exemption in writing from the school principal. Unlike in previous years, during the period covered by this report and the previous period, there were no complaints that requests for exemptions from Catholic religious instruction had been denied. Non-Catholics who wish their children to receive a religious education in their own faith are free to organize such classes, at their own expense, during the weekly hour allotted by the school for religious education; however, they must supply their own teacher.

By law, the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains, and Catholicism is the only recognized religion of military personnel. A 1999 government decree creating 40 Catholic military chaplaincies obliges members of the armed forces and

the police, as well as their civilian coworkers and relatives, to participate in such services. There have been no reports of discrimination or denials of promotion for non-Catholic members of the military, nor have there been any reports of personnel refusing to participate in Catholic services. As the number of non-Catholic Christians increases in the military, reflecting the increase in the number of evangelical Protestants nationwide, non-Catholic soldiers segregated in barracks find it difficult to attend religious services when no chaplains or chaplains' assistants exist for them.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious groups occasionally join forces in ecumenical works on behalf of the poor. The Catholic Church and evangelical churches collaborate closely in the area of human rights. The Catholic Church uses evangelical church staff in rural areas to minister to its congregations when there is no priest available.

The Catholic Church (through the CEAS) and CONEP (through its loosely affiliated Peace and Hope Evangelical Association) have conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and detainees wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy staff met with leaders of numerous religious communities, including representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and Protestant groups. The Embassy also continued to maintain regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including the CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, which is a 2-island federation, has an area of 104 square miles, and its population is approximately 46,000. Christianity is the dominant religion; an estimated 50 percent of the population adheres to Anglican beliefs, and 25 percent is Roman Catholic. Methodist, Moravian, Seventh-day Adventist, and Jehovah's Witnesses denominations also are present. Evangelical Christian denominations have been gaining followers. There is a small Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) community. Minority religions include Rastafarianism and the Baha'i Faith. There is no organized Jewish community, although there is a Jewish cemetery on Nevis.

There are two Catholic schools in the country—one primary and the other a primary and secondary school. There also is a Seventh-day Adventist primary school. The Government does not contribute financially to these 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 is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship.

The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for the registration of religious groups.

Christian holy days, such as Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In the past, Rastafarians in prison routinely had their dreadlocks cut off, a practice which ran counter to their religious beliefs. This practice has stopped; dreadlocks must now be secured by a net. Rastafarian children are allowed to wear long hair in school. Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, was illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Federation's citizens have a history of being open and tolerant of all faiths. Society is dominated by Christian attitudes, values, and mores; however, citizens respect the rights of followers of minority religions. The St. Kitts Christian Council, which includes the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and other traditional Christian faiths, conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different Christian denominations. The Evangelical Association unites 11 churches in the evangelical community and promotes their interests. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

While maintaining its secular nature, the Government required all schools to conduct morning Christian prayers and hymns. Government meetings generally began with a Christian religious invocation.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy (resident in Barbados) also discusses religious freedom issues with local religious groups.

SAINT LUCIA

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 238 square miles, and its population is approximately 163,000. Christianity is the dominant religion; Roman Catholics account for approximately 67 percent of the population, and the Catholic Church describes approximately 40 percent of these members as "active." The second largest group, which has grown rapidly in the last 20 years, is evangelical Christians, which includes Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Anglican Church has approximately 6,000 members (half are active), while Baptists and Methodists are present in smaller numbers.

The total number of non-Christians is very small. There are an estimated 350 Muslims who are primarily local converts, but there also are immigrants from the Middle East, South Asia, and other Caribbean countries. Muslims worship in two musallahs (informal places of worship); there are no mosques in the country. Other minority religions include Rastafarianism and 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. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Evangelicals, once discriminated against, are free to be politically active, and two Government ministers are members of evangelical denominations. This circumstance reflects the acceptance by broader society of evangelical denominations.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. The Government maintains a close relationship with the Christian Council, an organization comprised of the Roman Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations.

The Government strongly criticizes and investigates occasional incidents of religious intolerance.

Christian holy days, including Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

The Government requires presentation of a list of at least 100 members to register a religious group. Official recognition allows a religious organization to have duty-free import privileges and the right to register births, deaths, and marriages within the community. Any citizen can register life events with the Government; however, registration of a religious group allows its officials to act in this capacity as well. Muslim leaders applied for official recognition; their application was pending at the end of the period covered by this report due to a delay in gathering the required documents.

The public school curriculum includes Christian education; however, non-Christian students are not required to participate. There also are private schools sponsored by both the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, was illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, although some tension existed between the historically dominant Catholic Church and the rapidly growing evangelical denominations. Some evangelicals allegedly criticized Catholics and mainline Protestants for adherence to “slave religions” and for not accepting a literal interpretation of the Bible. A Muslim leader claimed that some recent converts to Islam hide their new religion from non-Muslim friends and family to avoid criticism and discrimination. The St. Lucia Christian Council conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

In 2003, the High Court sentenced two Rastafarian men to hang; at the end of the period covered by this report, they were in prison awaiting execution. The men were charged with murder and arson in the 2000 killing of a nun and priest who had been set on fire, along with other congregation members, during a Catholic Mass in the capital city of Castries. As a response to this incident, the Catholic Church conducts widely publicized cathedral security services at the church where the attack took place each Sunday and on all feast days to help the congregation feel more secure. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

St. Vincent and a chain of smaller islands, the Grenadines, have an area of 150 square miles, and the population is approximately 117,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. Most persons who claim a religious affiliation associate with the Anglican Church, although they may not be formal members of a congregation. The Anglican denomination has approximately 24,000 members, with one-third described as active. Formal membership remained constant over the period covered by this report, although the Anglican Church has lost many of its informally affiliated followers to evangelical denominations.

The Methodist Church has 4,500 members registered with congregations, although 12,000 persons claimed a Methodist affiliation in the last census. The majority of these 4,500 members are active in their church, which has experienced slow growth in recent years.

Approximately 11,000 citizens are Roman Catholic, and a majority of them are active in the Church. Membership has remained constant over the past few years.

The Seventh-day Adventist denomination claims 11,000 members and describes 50 percent as active. Evangelical in nature, the group continues to grow steadily.

There are 20 to 30 Pentecostal denominations present. The largest denomination, the Pentecostal Assembly of the West Indies, claims approximately 20 congregations. Overall, there are approximately 70 Pentecostal congregations. This group started to expand rapidly approximately 25 years ago and continues to grow. There is a small Salvation Army presence estimated at 70 members.

The number of non-Christians is small. The Baha'i Faith has approximately 1,500 adherents and is growing, and there are a small number of Rastafarians.

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 is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. The Government maintains a close relationship with the Christian Council, an organization comprised of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, and Methodist denominations.

Christian holy days, including Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

Students in public schools receive non-denominational religious instruction based on the Christian faith; however, students are not forced to participate in religious instruction. Representatives from different religious groups occasionally are invited to speak to the students. Most speakers represent the Anglican or Catholic Church. Teachers may provide information on other religions.

The Government occasionally organizes interfaith services through the Christian Council. In 2003, the Government sponsored a day of prayer in conjunction with all Christian denominations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, was illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, some members of society do not hold Rastafarianism in high regard because of its popular association with marijuana use. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools. Some tension continued to exist among different Christian denominations. For example, some evangelical Christians allegedly criticized Catholics and mainline Protestants for adherence to "slave religions" and for not accepting a literal interpretation of the Bible. A Baha'i representative claimed that some followers hide their faith from friends and co-workers to avoid criticism and discrimination.

The Christian Council of Churches conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith. Although the Christian Council has opened membership to all Christian denominations, none of the evangelical churches have joined.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

SURINAME

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 63,037 square miles, and its population is approximately 489,000. An estimated 37 percent of the population traces its ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, another 31 percent is of African descent, 15 percent claims Indonesian ancestry, and smaller percentages of the population are of Chinese, Amerindian, Portuguese, Lebanese, and Dutch extraction.

According to government estimates, 35 percent of the population is Christian, including Roman Catholic, 15 percent; Moravian, 13 percent; and other Protestant—among them Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, evangelical, Baptist, and Methodist—7 percent. Thirty percent of the population is Hindu, 24 percent identify themselves as Muslim, 8 percent follow indigenous religions, and 3 percent claim no faith. Indigenous religions are practiced by the Amerindians and the Afro-descendant Maroon populations. The Amerindians, who are principally concentrated in the interior and to a lesser extent in coastal areas, practice shamanism, a worship of all living things, including plants and animals, which they believe have a soul, through a medicine man, or *paiaman*. Maroons, who inhabit the interior, worship nature through a practice which has no special name, and they also worship their ancestors through a rite called *wintie*. Citizens of Amerindian and Maroon origin who classify themselves as Christian often simultaneously follow indigenous religious customs, which is known to and accepted by their Christian church leaders.

Immigrants practice faiths similar to those of native-born citizens.

Several Christian denominations, including Canadian and U.S.-based church groups, have established missionary programs throughout the country. There are an estimated 20 U.S. missionaries present, and nearly 90 percent of them are affiliated with the Baptist and Wesleyan Methodist churches.

There are approximately 150 Jews, along with small numbers of Baha'is and Buddhists. There are also other groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the World Islamic Call Society.

Many political parties have strong ethnic ties, and members tend to adhere to or practice one faith. Three out of the four governing coalition parties are ethnically based. For example, within the current governing coalition, the majority of members of the mostly Creole National Party of Suriname are Moravian, members of the mostly ethnic Indian United Reformed Party tend to be Hindu, and those of the mostly ethnic Javanese *Pertjaja Luhur* Party tend to be Muslim. However, parties have no requirement that political party leaders or members adhere to a particular religion.

There is no direct correlation between religious affiliation and socio-economic status; however, those who practice indigenous religions in the small villages of the interior generally have a lower socio-economic status. With the exception of those following indigenous practices, religious communities are not concentrated in any particular region of 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 Constitution contains two provisions that protect the right to worship freely. Article 18 states, "Everyone has the right of freedom of religion and philosophy of life." The Constitution also forbids religious discrimination. Article 8, Section 2 explicitly states, "No one shall be discriminated against on the grounds of birth, sex, race, language, religious origin, education, political beliefs, economic position, or any other status." Members of all faiths are allowed to worship freely.

There is no official state or otherwise dominant religion. The Government does not favor a particular religion.

The Government does not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular faith, religious beliefs, or interpretations of religious doctrine.

There are five holy days that are celebrated as official holidays: Holi Phagwa (Hindu), Good Friday (Christian), Easter Monday (Christian), Eid al-Fitre (Muslim), and Christmas (Christian). Citizens of all faiths tend to celebrate these holidays.

The Government does not establish requirements for recognition of religious faiths, nor are religious groups required to register with the Government.

Aside from the standard requirement for an entry visa, foreign missionaries face no special restrictions.

Government leaders attend religious services during religious holidays.

Government employees are not required to take a religious oath, and they are free to display or practice any element of their faith. For example, female civil servants are allowed to wear headscarves. The national anthem asks God to be with the nation.

Adherence to a particular faith does not confer advantage in civil, political, economic, military, or other secular areas.

The military maintains a chaplaincy with a Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic priest available to personnel of all faiths. While the chaplaincy provides interfaith services, military personnel are also welcome to attend outside religious services.

The government education system provides limited subsidies to a number of public elementary and secondary schools established and managed by various religious organizations. While the teachers are civil servants and the schools are public, religious groups provide all funding with the exception of teachers' salaries and a small maintenance stipend. Religious instruction in public schools is permitted; however, it is not required for all students. Schools offer religious instruction in a variety of faiths.

Parents are not allowed to home school their children for religious or other reasons; however, they are allowed to enroll their children in private schools, many of which have a religious affiliation. Students in public schools are allowed to practice all elements of their faith, including wearing headscarves, crosses, or yarmulkes.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Most citizens, particularly those living in the capital of Paramaribo, celebrate to varying degrees the religious holidays of other groups.

There is an interreligious council composed of representatives of various religious groups. Council members meet once a month to discuss planned ecumenical activities and their position on government policies.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains a regular dialogue with leaders of various religious communities. In May 2005, the Embassy engaged with key Muslim leaders to clarify allegations of abuses of the Qur'an in U.S. detention facilities. In June 2005, the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation awarded a grant to support a project to preserve early Moravian church archives.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,980 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 million. There is no dominant faith among the multiethnic population, which is 40 percent African and 40 percent East Indian; the remainder are mostly of European, Syrian, Lebanese, and Chinese descent. According to the latest official statistics (2000), 26 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 24.6 percent is Protestant (including 7.8 percent Anglican, 6.8 percent Pentecostal, 4 percent Seventh-day Adventist, 3.3 percent Presbyterian or Congregational, 1.8 percent Baptist, and 0.9 percent Methodist), 22.5 percent is Hindu, and 5.8 percent is Muslim. A small number of individuals subscribe to traditional Caribbean religions with African roots, such as the Shouter Baptists (5.4 percent) and the Orisha (0.1 percent). The remainder are Jehovah's Witnesses (1.6 percent), atheists (1.9 percent), "other," which includes numerous small Christian groups as well as Bahai's, Rastafarians, Buddhists, and Jews (10.7 percent), or undeclared (1.4 percent).

Afro-Trinidadians are predominantly Christian, with a small Muslim community, and are historically concentrated in the area of Port-of-Spain and the east-west corridor of Trinidad. The population of Trinidad's sister island, Tobago, is also overwhelmingly of African descent and predominantly Christian. Indo-Trinidadians traditionally are concentrated in central and southern Trinidad and are principally divided between the Hindu and Muslim faiths, along with significant Presbyterian and some Roman Catholic representation. Ethnic and religious divisions are reflected in political life, with most Afro-Trinidadians voting for the governing People's National Movement party, and most Indo-Trinidadians supporting the opposition United National Congress (UNC) party. Religious overtones are sometimes present in the messages and ceremonies of these political parties, particularly those of the UNC, which occasionally incorporates Hindu references and cultural expressions into their public events.

Foreign missionaries present include members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Baptists, Mennonites, and Muslims. The Mormons maintain 34 foreign missionaries, while other denominations maintain between 5 and 10 foreign missionaries 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 main guarantor of freedom of religion is Part 1, Sec. 4 (h) of the Constitution, which states, "freedom of conscience and religious belief and observance" is a fundamental human right and freedom.

To receive tax-exempt donations and gifts of land, or to perform marriages, religious groups must register with the Government, which requires them to demonstrate that they are nonprofit organizations. Religious groups have the same rights and obligations as most legal entities, regardless of whether they are registered. They can own land, but they must pay property taxes; they can hire employees, but they must pay government-mandated employee benefits. Some religious groups register their organizations for increased visibility and to attract wider membership.

The Government subsidizes both public and religiously affiliated schools. It permits religious instruction in public schools, setting aside a time each week when any religious organization with an adherent in the school can provide an instructor in its faith. Attendance at these classes is voluntary, and the faiths represented are diverse. Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. Home schooling is not allowed, as the Education Act mandates formal schooling for all children, whether in public or private schools.

In the Government, the portfolio of ecclesiastical affairs falls under the Office of the Prime Minister-Social Service Delivery, which administers annual financial

grants to religious organizations and issues recommendations on land use by such organizations.

The law prohibits acts that would offend or insult another person or group on the grounds of race, origin, or religion or which would incite racial or religious hatred, and it provides for prosecution for the desecration of any place of worship. Government officials routinely speak out against religious intolerance and generally do not favor publicly any religion. In recent years, the Government has strengthened legal prohibitions against religious discrimination by amending legislation to remove certain discriminatory religious references. The process of judicial review is available to those who claim to be victims of religious discrimination.

The Government has set aside public holidays for every religious group with large followings, including Christians, Hindus, and Muslims. The Christian holidays are Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas; the Hindu holiday is Divali; and the Muslim holiday is Eid al-Fitr. In addition, the Government recognizes the Spiritual Baptist Liberation Shouter Day, associated with the Spiritual Baptist Shouter religion. The Government grants financial and technical assistance to various organizations to support religious festivals and celebrations. Persons of all faiths participate in these religious holidays, and they do not negatively affect any religious group.

The Government does not formally sponsor programs that promote interfaith dialogue; however, it supports the activities of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO). This organization serves as an interfaith coordinating committee for public outreach, governmental and media relations, and policy implementation. It also provides the prayer leader for several official events, such as the opening of Parliament and the annual court term. The IRO liaises with the Ministry of Social Services as well as the Ministry of Education in its governmental relations.

The Government is committed to religious freedom. Ministers, Members of Parliament, and public figures come from every faith and denomination and represent the broad spectrum of religious beliefs in the country. They often participate in the ceremonies and holidays of other religions and actively preach religious tolerance and harmony.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Foreign missionaries operated relatively freely; however, the Government limited the number of foreign missionaries allowed to be in the country to 30 per religious denomination at any given time. Missionaries must meet standard requirements for an entry visa, must represent a registered religious group, and may not remain in the country for more than 3 years at a time. However, they may re-enter the country after a year of absence.

Citizens were not denied the opportunity to serve in the military because of religious beliefs. The military service was predominantly Afro-Trinidadian and Christian, and the military maintained a part-time chaplain to provide Christian religious services. Military personnel also had access to other religious services in their local communities.

The Government was known to monitor closely three religiously affiliated groups. One is a radical Muslim organization called the Jamaat al Muslimeen, whose members attempted a coup in 1990 and, in 2001, were ordered by a court to pay the Government \$2.5 million for damage done to public buildings during the coup attempt. A senior member of the Jamaat was convicted in a U.S. court in May 2005 of conspiring to export weapons to the country. The Government also monitored the Jamaat al Murabiteen because of its affiliation with former Jamaat al Muslimeen lieutenant Maulana Hasan Anyabwile. The Waajihatul Islaamiyyah was monitored as well because of its association with the religious fanatic Omar Abdullah.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Society is multiethnic and multireligious, and religious tolerance is instilled very early in life. Members of different religious faiths often grow up to-

gether as neighbors and participate in each other's religious ceremonies. The Hindu celebration of Divali is the most notable example of this circumstance, attracting participants from all denominations. Political leaders attend celebrations of all faiths and often deliver speeches on religious tolerance that highlight the country's diversity. The IRO, which is composed of leaders of nearly all faiths with significant followings in the country, promotes interfaith dialogue and tolerance through study groups, publications, and cultural and religious exhibitions. The bylaws of the IRO do not exclude any groups from membership. However, the Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists do not participate for doctrinal reasons. The Mormons currently are involved in membership negotiations with the IRO.

Complaints occasionally were made about the efforts of some groups to proselytize in neighborhoods where another religion was dominant. The most frequent public complaints had been lodged by Hindu religious leaders against evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. Such objections may reflect racial tensions that at times arose between the Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian communities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. To promote greater interfaith dialogue, the U.S. Embassy often invites members of different congregations to ceremonial events, such as the annual September 11 memorial observance.

URUGUAY

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 68,039 square miles, and its population is estimated at 3.2 million. While the Government keeps no statistics concerning religious affiliation, an October 2004 academic survey published in the daily newspaper *El Pais* reported that 54 percent of those surveyed designated themselves as Roman Catholics, 6.3 percent as evangelical Protestants, 5 percent as Protestants, 9 percent as believers without a religious affiliation, and 26 percent as nonbelievers. The mainline Protestant minority is composed primarily of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other denominations and branches include evangelicals, Pentecostals, Mennonites, Eastern Orthodox, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) claims 85,000 members. There are approximately 30,000 Jews, who support 15 synagogues.

The Unification Church is active in the country and has major property holdings. There also is a Muslim population that lives primarily near the border with Brazil. The estimated 4,000 Baha'is are concentrated primarily in Montevideo.

Many Christian groups perform foreign missionary work. For example, there are an estimated 360 Mormon missionaries 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 Constitution and law prohibit discrimination based on religion.

There is strict separation of church and state. All religious groups are entitled to tax exemptions on their houses of worship, and there were no reports of difficulties in receiving these exemptions. To receive the tax exemptions, a religious group must register as a nonprofit entity and draft organizing statutes. It then applies to the Ministry of Education and Culture, which examines the legal entity and grants reli-

religious status. The group must reapply every 5 years. Once the ministry grants religious status, the church can request an exemption each year from the taxing body, which is usually the municipal government.

Religious instruction in public schools is prohibited. Public schools allow students who belong to minority religions to miss school for religious holidays without penalty. There are private religious schools, which are mainly Catholic and Jewish.

The holy days of Three Kings Day, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as official national holidays.

The Penal Code prohibits mistreatment of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The House of Deputies' Constitutional Legislative Affairs Commission revised the code to broaden the definition of hate crimes, thereby making it easier for police to classify certain offenses as hate crimes and to provide the judicial system with the tools necessary to sentence violators to jail. In September 2004, Law 17.817, which specifically penalizes acts of xenophobia and other types of discrimination, went into effect.

Foreign missionaries face no special requirements or restrictions.

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Christian-Jewish Council meets regularly to promote interfaith understanding. In addition, the mainstream Protestant denominations meet regularly among themselves and with the Roman Catholic Church. There are several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promote interfaith understanding.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy representatives met with human rights and religious NGOs, including B'nai B'rith and the Israeli Central Committee of Uruguay. They also met with the leaders of religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Islamic community, and Mormon and Protestant groups.

The Embassy maintains frequent contact with religious and nonreligious organizations that are involved in the protection of human rights, such as Mundo Afro, which represents the interests of citizens of African descent.

VENEZUELA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, there were some efforts by the Government, motivated by political reasons, to limit the influence of churches in certain social and political areas.

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 as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 352,144 square miles, and its population is approximately 24.5 million. According to government estimates, 70 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 29 percent is Protestant, and the remaining 1 percent practices other religions or is atheist. The Venezuelan Evangelical Council estimates that Protestants are approximately 9 percent of the population, or approximately 2 million persons. There are small but influential Jewish and Muslim communities. The country's Jewish community numbers approximately 20,000 and is very active in the capital, Caracas. The Muslim community is concentrated among citizens of Lebanese and Syrian descent.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion on the condition that the practice of a religion does not violate public morality, decency, and the public order, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

The Directorate of Justice and Religion (DJR) in the Ministry of Interior and Justice is mandated to maintain a registry of religious groups, disburse funds to the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations, and promote awareness and understanding among religious communities. Each group must register with the DJR to have legal status as a religious organization and to own property. Requirements for registration are largely administrative, the key exception being that groups serve the community's social interests. Some groups have complained that the process is slow and inefficient. The Government refused to register several groups in 2004, citing primarily administrative reasons.

A 1964 concordat underscores the country's historical ties to the Roman Catholic Church and provides the basis for government subsidies to the Church. All registered religious groups are eligible for funding to support religious services, but most money goes to Catholic organizations because their assigned shares are fixed. During 2004, the Government disbursed approximately \$169,000 (363 million bolivars) to religious organizations. Catholic dioceses and archdioceses, as well as the Episcopal Conference of Venezuela (CEV), which is comprised of the country's Catholic bishops, received approximately \$96,000 (207 million bolivars). The Government estimated that funding for the Catholic Church would substantially decrease in 2005, due to stricter reporting procedures. In 2004, approximately 10 other religious organizations received an estimated total of \$72,000 (156 million bolivars).

The Government estimates that there are approximately 3,000 foreign missionaries in the country. They require special visas. Missionaries generally are not refused entry, but many complain that the process of obtaining a visa often takes months or years due to bureaucratic inefficiency.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Constitution forbids the use of religion to avoid obeying the law or interfere with the rights of others; however, there were some efforts by the Government, motivated by political reasons, to limit the influence of the Catholic Church in certain social and political areas.

The Government provides annual subsidies to Catholic schools and social programs that help the poor. Other religious groups are free to establish and operate their own schools; however, the only official subsidies that these schools receive are in the form of building repairs.

The military chaplain corps is comprised exclusively of Roman Catholic priests. Although service members of other religious groups are allowed to attend services of their faith, they do not have the same access to clergy members that Catholic service members enjoy.

In 2000, the Supreme Court ruled that religious organizations are not part of "civil society" and therefore may not represent citizens in court or bring their own legal actions. Although the Catholic Church expressed concern with the ruling, the decision has had no effect on the conduct of Church activities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Public confrontation between Catholic bishops and government officials subsided in the immediate aftermath of the August 2004 presidential recall referendum but then reemerged as Cardinal Castillo, supported by the Catholic Bishops' Conference, criticized government actions directed against civil society and the press. The Government's response has been harsh and is designed to intimidate Church officials and sow division within the Church.

In July 2004, the CEV called on voters to participate in the August 2004 presidential referendum as an "exercise of conscience." Chavez supporters, including Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel, protested that the Church was taking an inappropriate role in politics.

The Catholic leadership continued to press the Government on human rights and democracy issues. Prior to the October 2004 regional elections, the CEV issued a statement urging free and fair elections. At the CEV's biannual conference in January 2005, the bishops criticized recent government legislation as prejudicial to the conduct of an open society and petitioned for the release of those condemned or accused of crimes in relation to the recent political crisis.

The country is a historically open society without significant anti-Semitism; however, the Government and its supporters occasionally demonstrated possible anti-Semitism. In December 2004, during the Second Bolivarian Congress, placards signed by the government political party MVR (Movement for a Fifth Republic) and the Venezuelan Communist Party, among other groups, were placed in front of the area where the congress took place. Some placards carried statements accusing Israel of having terrorist commandos in the country.

In November 2004, after the assassination of well-known prosecutor Danilo Anderson, the Government used satirical comments made by journalist Orlando Urdaneta on a U.S. television program to allude to possible Israeli participation in Anderson's killing. The Israeli Embassy in Caracas denied any Israeli involvement in the assassination and warned that such representations by the Government were misleading. On November 29, 2004, members of the country's investigative police searched the Hebrew Center of Caracas at the beginning of the school day as part of the Anderson investigation. Jewish community leaders expressed outrage and indicated doubt regarding the authorities' explanation for the search. Newspaper reports suggested that rumors of Israeli involvement in the assassination might have been behind the investigation.

In August 2004, several incidents of anti-Semitism occurred during the time of the presidential referendum. The pro-government daily newspaper VEA published an article containing accusations that Jewish leaders in the country had participated in the 2002 coup against the Government. During a political rally, graffiti labeling Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon an assassin and condemning the Zionist movement was painted on a Caracas synagogue. A few days after his electoral victory, President Chavez gave a speech in which he compared the opposition to "wandering Jews."

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.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

In May 2004, small explosive devices went off near two Mormon churches, one in Valencia and the other in San Cristobal. Damages were slight, and there were no injuries. Anti-U.S. and anti-Mormon propaganda pamphlets were found at each site. There was limited government followup to the bombings after an initial police investigation.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains close contact with various religious communities. The Ambassador meets regularly with religious authorities, and the Embassy facilitates communication between U.S. religious groups and the Government.

A P P E N D I X E S

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore, The General Assembly, proclaims this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of a kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

Article 4

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11

1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense.

2. No one shall be held guilty without any limitation due to race, of any penal offence on account of nationality or religion, have the any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed.

Article 12

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor be denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17

1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration insuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

*Hundred and eighty-third plenary meeting
Resolution 217(A)(III) of the United Nations General Assembly,
December 10, 1948*

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APPENDIX B

INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

and

THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Preamble

The States Parties to the present Covenant,

Considering that, in accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Recognizing that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person,

Recognizing that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his economic, social and cultural rights,

Considering the obligation of States under the Charter of the United Nations to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and freedoms,

Realizing that the individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized in the present Covenant,

Agree upon the following articles:

PART I

Article 1

1. All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

2. All peoples may, for their own ends, freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic co-operation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination, and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

PART II**Article 2**

1. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

2. Where not already provided for by existing legislative or other measures, each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to take the necessary steps, in accordance with its constitutional processes and with the provisions of the present Covenant, to adopt such laws or other measures as may be necessary to give effect to the rights recognized in the present Covenant.

3. Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes:

(a) To ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms as herein recognized are violated shall have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity;

(b) To ensure that any person claiming such a remedy shall have his right thereto determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy;

(c) To ensure that the competent authorities shall enforce such remedies when granted.

Article 3

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present Covenant.

Article 4

1. In time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed, the States Parties to the present Covenant may take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures are not inconsistent with their other obligations under international law and do not involve discrimination solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin.

2. No derogation from articles 6, 7, 8 (paragraphs 1 and 2), 11, 15, 16 and 18 may be made under this provision.

3. Any State Party to the present Covenant availing itself of the right of derogation shall immediately inform the other States Parties to the present Covenant, through the intermediary of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, of the provisions from which it has derogated and of the reasons by which it was actuated. A further communication shall be made, through the same intermediary, on the date on which it terminates such derogation.

Article 5

1. Nothing in the present Covenant may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms recognized herein or at their limitation to a greater extent than is provided for in the present Covenant.

2. There shall be no restriction upon or derogation from any of the fundamental human rights recognized or existing in any State Party to the present Covenant pursuant to law, conventions, regulations or custom on the pretext that the present Covenant does not recognize such rights or that it recognizes them to a lesser extent.

PART III**Article 6**

1. Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.

2. In countries which have not abolished the death penalty, sentence of death may be imposed only for the most serious crimes in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the crime and not contrary to the provisions of the

present Covenant and to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This penalty can only be carried out pursuant to a final judgement rendered by a competent court.

3. When deprivation of life constitutes the crime of genocide, it is understood that nothing in this article shall authorize any State Party to the present Covenant to derogate in any way from any obligation assumed under the provisions of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

4. Anyone sentenced to death shall have the right to seek pardon or commutation of the sentence. Amnesty, pardon or commutation of the sentence of death may be granted in all cases.

5. Sentence of death shall not be imposed for crimes committed by persons below eighteen years of age and shall not be carried out on pregnant women.

6. Nothing in this article shall be invoked to delay or to prevent the abolition of capital punishment by any State Party to the present Covenant.

Article 7

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.

Article 8

1. No one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited.

2. No one shall be held in servitude.

3. (a) No one shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour;

(b) Paragraph 3 (a) shall not be held to preclude, in countries where imprisonment with hard labour may be imposed as a punishment for a crime, the performance of hard labour in pursuance of a sentence to such punishment by a competent court;

(c) For the purpose of this paragraph the term "forced or compulsory labour" shall not include:

(i) Any work or service, not referred to in subparagraph (b), normally required of a person who is under detention in consequence of a lawful order of a court, or of a person during conditional release from such detention;

(ii) Any service of a military character and, in countries where conscientious objection is recognized, any national service required by law of conscientious objectors;

(iii) Any service exacted in cases of emergency or calamity threatening the life or well-being of the community;

(iv) Any work or service which forms part of normal civil obligations.

Article 9

1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.

2. Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him.

3. Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to release. It shall not be the general rule that persons awaiting trial shall be detained in custody, but release may be subject to guarantees to appear for trial, at any other stage of the judicial proceedings, and, should occasion arise, for execution of the judgement.

4. Anyone who is deprived of his liberty by arrest or detention shall be entitled to take proceedings before a court, in order that court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of his detention and order his release if the detention is not lawful.

5. Anyone who has been the victim of unlawful arrest or detention shall have an enforceable right to compensation.

Article 10

1. All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

2. (a) Accused persons shall, save in exceptional circumstances, be segregated from convicted persons and shall be subject to separate treatment appropriate to their status as unconvicted persons;

(b) Accused juvenile persons shall be separated from adults and brought as speedily as possible for adjudication.

3. The penitentiary system shall comprise treatment of prisoners the essential aim of which shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation. Juvenile offenders shall be segregated from adults and be accorded treatment appropriate to their age and legal status.

Article 11

No one shall be imprisoned merely on the ground of inability to fulfil a contractual obligation.

Article 12

1. Everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his residence.

2. Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.

3. The above-mentioned rights shall not be subject to any restrictions except those which are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order (ordre public), public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the present Covenant.

4. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.

Article 13

An alien lawfully in the territory of a State Party to the present Covenant may be expelled therefrom only in pursuance of a decision reached in accordance with law and shall, except where compelling reasons of national security otherwise require, be allowed to submit the reasons against his expulsion and to have his case reviewed by, and be represented for the purpose before, the competent authority or a person or persons especially designated by the competent authority.

Article 14

1. All persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals. In the determination of any criminal charge against him, or of his rights and obligations in a suit at law, everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. The press and the public may be excluded from all or part of a trial for reasons of morals, public order (ordre public) or national security in a democratic society, or when the interest of the private lives of the parties so requires, or to the extent strictly necessary in the opinion of the court in special circumstances where publicity would prejudice the interests of justice; but any judgement rendered in a criminal case or in a suit at law shall be made public except where the interest of juvenile persons otherwise requires or the proceedings concern matrimonial disputes or the guardianship of children.

2. Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall have the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.

3. In the determination of any criminal charge against him, everyone shall be entitled to the following minimum guarantees, in full equality:

(a) To be informed promptly and in detail in a language which he understands of the nature and cause of the charge against him;

(b) To have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence and to communicate with counsel of his own choosing;

(c) To be tried without undue delay;

(d) To be tried in his presence, and to defend himself in person or through legal assistance of his own choosing; to be informed, if he does not have legal assistance, of this right; and to have legal assistance assigned to him, in any case where the interests of justice so require, and without payment by him in any such case if he does not have sufficient means to pay for it;

(e) To examine, or have examined, the witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him;

(f) To have the free assistance of an interpreter if he cannot understand or speak the language used in court;

(g) Not to be compelled to testify against himself or to confess guilt.

4. In the case of juvenile persons, the procedure shall be such as will take account of their age and the desirability of promoting their rehabilitation.

5. Everyone convicted of a crime shall have the right to his conviction and sentence being reviewed by a higher tribunal according to law.

6. When a person has by a final decision been convicted of a criminal offence and when subsequently his conviction has been reversed or he has been pardoned on the ground that a new or newly discovered fact shows conclusively that there has been a miscarriage of justice, the person who has suffered punishment as a result of such conviction shall be compensated according to law, unless it is proved that the non-disclosure of the unknown fact in time is wholly or partly attributable to him.

7. No one shall be liable to be tried or punished again for an offence for which he has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with the law and penal procedure of each country.

Article 15

1. No one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time when the criminal offence was committed. If, subsequent to the commission of the offence, provision is made by law for the imposition of the lighter penalty, the offender shall benefit thereby.

2. Nothing in this article shall prejudice the trial and punishment of any person for any act or omission which, at the time when it was committed, was criminal according to the general principles of law recognized by the community of nations.

Article 16

Everyone shall have the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 17

1. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 18

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Article 19

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Article 20

1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.

2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Article 21

The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 22

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

2. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on members of the armed forces and of the police in their exercise of this right.

3. Nothing in this article shall authorize States Parties to the International Labour Organization Convention of 1948 concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize to take legislative measures which would prejudice, or to apply the law in such a manner as to prejudice, the guarantees provided for in that Convention.

Article 23

1. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

2. The right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognized.

3. No marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

4. States Parties to the present Covenant shall take appropriate steps to ensure equality of rights and responsibilities of spouses as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. In the case of dissolution, provision shall be made for the necessary protection of any children.

Article 24

1. Every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State.

2. Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name.

3. Every child has the right to acquire a nationality.

Article 25

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;

(b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;

(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.

Article 26

All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Article 27

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the

other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

PART IV

Article 28

1. There shall be established a Human Rights Committee (hereafter referred to in the present Covenant as the Committee). It shall consist of eighteen members and shall carry out the functions hereinafter provided.

2. The Committee shall be composed of nationals of the States Parties to the present Covenant who shall be persons of high moral character and recognized competence in the field of human rights, consideration being given to the usefulness of the participation of some persons having legal experience.

3. The members of the Committee shall be elected and shall serve in their personal capacity.

Article 29

1. The members of the Committee shall be elected by secret ballot from a list of persons possessing the qualifications prescribed in article 28 and nominated for the purpose by the States Parties to the present Covenant.

2. Each State Party to the present Covenant may nominate not more than two persons. These persons shall be nationals of the nominating State.

3. A person shall be eligible for renomination.

Article 30

1. The initial election shall be held no later than six months after the date of the entry into force of the present Covenant.

2. At least four months before the date of each election to the Committee, other than an election to fill a vacancy declared in accordance with article 34, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall address a written invitation to the States Parties to the present Covenant to submit their nominations for membership of the Committee within three months.

3. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall prepare a list in alphabetical order of all the persons thus nominated, with an indication of the States Parties which have nominated them, and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Covenant no later than one month before the date of each election.

4. Elections of the members of the Committee shall be held at a meeting of the States Parties to the present Covenant convened by the Secretary General of the United Nations at the Headquarters of the United Nations. At that meeting, for which two thirds of the States Parties to the present Covenant shall constitute a quorum, the persons elected to the Committee shall be those nominees who obtain the largest number of votes and an absolute majority of the votes of the representatives of States Parties present and voting.

Article 31

1. The Committee may not include more than one national of the same State.

2. In the election of the Committee, consideration shall be given to equitable geographical distribution of membership and to the representation of the different forms of civilization and of the principal legal systems.

Article 32

1. The members of the Committee shall be elected for a term of four years. They shall be eligible for re-election if renominated. However, the terms of nine of the members elected at the first election shall expire at the end of two years; immediately after the first election, the names of these nine members shall be chosen by lot by the Chairman of the meeting referred to in article 30, paragraph 4.

2. Elections at the expiry of office shall be held in accordance with the preceding articles of this part of the present Covenant.

Article 33

1. If, in the unanimous opinion of the other members, a member of the Committee has ceased to carry out his functions for any cause other than absence of a temporary character, the Chairman of the Committee shall notify the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall then declare the seat of that member to be vacant.

2. In the event of the death or the resignation of a member of the Committee, the Chairman shall immediately notify the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall declare the seat vacant from the date of death or the date on which the resignation takes effect.

Article 34

1. When a vacancy is declared in accordance with article 33 and if the term of office of the member to be replaced does not expire within six months of the declaration of the vacancy, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall notify each of the States Parties to the present Covenant, which may within two months submit nominations in accordance with article 29 for the purpose of filling the vacancy.

2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall prepare a list in alphabetical order of the persons thus nominated and shall submit it to the States Parties to the present Covenant. The election to fill the vacancy shall then take place in accordance with the relevant provisions of this part of the present Covenant.

3. A member of the Committee elected to fill a vacancy declared in accordance with article 33 shall hold office for the remainder of the term of the member who vacated the seat on the Committee under the provisions of that article.

Article 35

The members of the Committee shall, with the approval of the General Assembly of the United Nations, receive emoluments from United Nations resources on such terms and conditions as the General Assembly may decide, having regard to the importance of the Committee's responsibilities.

Article 36

The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee under the present Covenant.

Article 37

1. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall convene the initial meeting of the Committee at the Headquarters of the United Nations.

2. After its initial meeting, the Committee shall meet at such times as shall be provided in its rules of procedure.

3. The Committee shall normally meet at the Headquarters of the United Nations or at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Article 38

Every member of the Committee shall, before taking up his duties, make a solemn declaration in open committee that he will perform his functions impartially and conscientiously.

Article 39

1. The Committee shall elect its officers for a term of two years. They may be re-elected.

2. The Committee shall establish its own rules of procedure, but these rules shall provide, inter alia, that:

(a) Twelve members shall constitute a quorum;

(b) Decisions of the Committee shall be made by a majority vote of the members present.

Article 40

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to submit reports on the measures they have adopted which give effect to the rights recognized herein and on the progress made in the enjoyment of those rights:

(a) Within one year of the entry into force of the present Covenant for the States Parties concerned;

(b) Thereafter whenever the Committee so requests.

2. All reports shall be submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall transmit them to the Committee for consideration. Reports shall indicate the factors and difficulties, if any, affecting the implementation of the present Covenant.

3. The Secretary-General of the United Nations may, after consultation with the Committee, transmit to the specialized agencies concerned copies of such parts of the reports as may fall within their field of competence.

4. The Committee shall study the reports submitted by the States Parties to the present Covenant. It shall transmit its reports, and such general comments as it may consider appropriate, to the States Parties. The Committee may also transmit to the Economic and Social Council these comments along with the copies of the reports it has received from States Parties to the present Covenant.

5. The States Parties to the present Covenant may submit to the Committee observations on any comments that may be made in accordance with paragraph 4 of this article.

Article 41

1. A State Party to the present Covenant may at any time declare under this article that it recognizes the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications to the effect that a State Party claims that another State Party is not fulfilling its obligations under the present Covenant. Communications under this article may be received and considered only if submitted by a State Party which has made a declaration recognizing in regard to itself the competence of the Committee. No communication shall be received by the Committee if it concerns a State Party which has not made such a declaration. Communications received under this article shall be dealt with in accordance with the following procedure:

(a) If a State Party to the present Covenant considers that another State Party is not giving effect to the provisions of the present Covenant, it may, by written communication, bring the matter to the attention of that State Party. Within three months after the receipt of the communication the receiving State shall afford the State which sent the communication an explanation, or any other statement in writing clarifying the matter which should include, to the extent possible and pertinent, reference to domestic procedures and remedies taken, pending, or available in the matter;

(b) If the matter is not adjusted to the satisfaction of both States Parties concerned within six months after the receipt by the receiving State of the initial communication, either State shall have the right to refer the matter to the Committee, by notice given to the Committee and to the other State;

(c) The Committee shall deal with a matter referred to it only after it has ascertained that all available domestic remedies have been invoked and exhausted in the matter, in conformity with the generally recognized principles of international law. This shall not be the rule where the application of the remedies is unreasonably prolonged;

(d) The Committee shall hold closed meetings when examining communications under this article;

(e) Subject to the provisions of subparagraph (c), the Committee shall make available its good offices to the States Parties concerned with a view to a friendly solution of the matter on the basis of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognized in the present Covenant;

(f) In any matter referred to it, the Committee may call upon the States Parties concerned, referred to in subparagraph (b), to supply any relevant information;

(g) The States Parties concerned, referred to in subparagraph (b), shall have the right to be represented when the matter is being considered in the Committee and to make submissions orally and/or in writing;

(h) The Committee shall, within twelve months after the date of receipt of notice under subparagraph (b), submit a report:

(i) If a solution within the terms of subparagraph (e) is reached, the Committee shall confine its report to a brief statement of the facts and of the solution reached;

(ii) If a solution within the terms of subparagraph (e) is not reached, the Committee shall confine its report to a brief statement of the facts; the written submissions and record of the oral submissions made by the States Parties concerned shall be attached to the report. In every matter, the report shall be communicated to the States Parties concerned.

2. The provisions of this article shall come into force when ten States Parties to the present Covenant have made declarations under paragraph 1 of this article. Such declarations shall be deposited by the States Parties with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall transmit copies thereof to the other States Parties. A declaration may be withdrawn at any time by notification to the Secretary-General. Such a withdrawal shall not prejudice the consideration of any mat-

ter which is the subject of a communication already transmitted under this article; no further communication by any State Party shall be received after the notification of withdrawal of the declaration has been received by the Secretary-General, unless the State Party concerned has made a new declaration.

Article 42

1. (a) If a matter referred to the Committee in accordance with article 41 is not resolved to the satisfaction of the States Parties concerned, the Committee may, with the prior consent of the States Parties concerned, appoint an ad hoc Conciliation Commission (hereinafter referred to as the Commission). The good offices of the Commission shall be made available to the States Parties concerned with a view to an amicable solution of the matter on the basis of respect for the present Covenant;
 - (b) The Commission shall consist of five persons acceptable to the States Parties concerned. If the States Parties concerned fail to reach agreement within three months on all or part of the composition of the Commission, the members of the Commission concerning whom no agreement has been reached shall be elected by secret ballot by a two-thirds majority vote of the Committee from among its members.
2. The members of the Commission shall serve in their personal capacity. They shall not be nationals of the States Parties concerned, or of a State not Party to the present Covenant, or of a State Party which has not made a declaration under article 41.
3. The Commission shall elect its own Chairman and adopt its own rules of procedure.
4. The meetings of the Commission shall normally be held at the Headquarters of the United Nations or at the United Nations Office at Geneva. However, they may be held at such other convenient places as the Commission may determine in consultation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the States Parties concerned.
5. The secretariat provided in accordance with article 36 shall also service the commissions appointed under this article.
6. The information received and collated by the Committee shall be made available to the Commission and the Commission may call upon the States Parties concerned to supply any other relevant information.
7. When the Commission has fully considered the matter, but in any event not later than twelve months after having been seized of the matter, it shall submit to the Chairman of the Committee a report for communication to the States Parties concerned:
 - (a) If the Commission is unable to complete its consideration of the matter within twelve months, it shall confine its report to a brief statement of the status of its consideration of the matter;
 - (b) If an amicable solution to the matter on the basis of respect for human rights as recognized in the present Covenant is reached, the Commission shall confine its report to a brief statement of the facts and of the solution reached;
 - (c) If a solution within the terms of subparagraph (b) is not reached, the Commission's report shall embody its findings on all questions of fact relevant to the issues between the States Parties concerned, and its views on the possibilities of an amicable solution of the matter. This report shall also contain the written submissions and a record of the oral submissions made by the States Parties concerned;
 - (d) If the Commission's report is submitted under subparagraph (c), the States Parties concerned shall, within three months of the receipt of the report, notify the Chairman of the Committee whether or not they accept the contents of the report of the Commission.
8. The provisions of this article are without prejudice to the responsibilities of the Committee under article 41.
9. The States Parties concerned shall share equally all the expenses of the members of the Commission in accordance with estimates to be provided by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
10. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall be empowered to pay the expenses of the members of the Commission, if necessary, before reimbursement by the States Parties concerned, in accordance with paragraph 9 of this article.

Article 43

The members of the Committee, and of the ad hoc conciliation commissions which may be appointed under article 42, shall be entitled to the facilities, privileges and

immunities of experts on mission for the United Nations as laid down in the relevant sections of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

Article 44

The provisions for the implementation of the present Covenant shall apply without prejudice to the procedures prescribed in the field of human rights by or under the constituent instruments and the conventions of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies and shall not prevent the States Parties to the present Covenant from having recourse to other procedures for settling a dispute in accordance with general or special international agreements in force between them.

Article 45

The Committee shall submit to the General Assembly of the United Nations, through the Economic and Social Council, an annual report on its activities.

PART V

Article 46

Nothing in the present Covenant shall be interpreted as impairing the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and of the constitutions of the specialized agencies which define the respective responsibilities of the various organs of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies in regard to the matters dealt with in the present Covenant.

Article 47

Nothing in the present Covenant shall be interpreted as impairing the inherent right of all peoples to enjoy and utilize fully and freely their natural wealth and resources.

PART VI

Article 48

1. The present Covenant is open for signature by any State Member of the United Nations or member of any of its specialized agencies, by any State Party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice, and by any other State which has been invited by the General Assembly of the United Nations to become a Party to the present Covenant.

2. The present Covenant is subject to ratification. Instruments of ratification shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

3. The present Covenant shall be open to accession by any State referred to in paragraph 1 of this article.

4. Accession shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument of accession with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

5. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall inform all States which have signed this Covenant or acceded to it of the deposit of each instrument of ratification or accession.

Article 49

1. The present Covenant shall enter into force three months after the date of the deposit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the thirty-fifth instrument of ratification or instrument of accession.

2. For each State ratifying the present Covenant or acceding to it after the deposit of the thirty-fifth instrument of ratification or instrument of accession, the present Covenant shall enter into force three months after the date of the deposit of its own instrument of ratification or instrument of accession.

Article 50

The provisions of the present Covenant shall extend to all parts of federal States without any limitations or exceptions.

Article 51

1. Any State Party to the present Covenant may propose an amendment and file it with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall thereupon communicate any proposed amendments to the States Parties to the present Covenant with a request that they notify him whether they favour a conference of States Parties for the purpose of considering and voting upon the proposals. In the event that at least one third of the States Parties favours such a conference, the Secretary-General shall convene the conference under the auspices of the United Nations. Any amendment adopted by a majority of the States Parties present and voting at the conference shall be submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations for approval.

2. Amendments shall come into force when they have been approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations and accepted by a two-thirds majority of the States Parties to the present Covenant in accordance with their respective constitutional processes.

3. When amendments come into force, they shall be binding on those States Parties which have accepted them, other States Parties still being bound by the provisions of the present Covenant and any earlier amendment which they have accepted.

Article 52

Irrespective of the notifications made under article 48, paragraph 5, the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall inform all States referred to in paragraph 1 of the same article of the following particulars:

(a) Signatures, ratifications and accessions under article 48;

(b) The date of the entry into force of the present Covenant under article 49 and the date of the entry into force of any amendments under article 51.

Article 53

1. The present Covenant, of which the Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic, shall be deposited in the archives of the United Nations.

2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall transmit certified copies of the present Covenant to all States referred to in article 48.

DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

The General Assembly,

Considering that one of the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations is that of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, and that all Member States have pledged themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organization to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion,

Considering that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights proclaim the principles of nondiscrimination and equality before the law and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief,

Considering that the disregard and infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or whatever belief, have brought, directly or indirectly, wars and great suffering to mankind, especially where they serve as a means of foreign interference in the internal affairs of other States and amount to kindling hatred between peoples and nations,

Considering that religion or belief, for anyone who professes either, is one of the fundamental elements in his conception of life and that freedom of religion or belief should be fully respected and guaranteed,

Considering that it is essential to promote understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion and belief and to ensure that the use of religion or belief for ends inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, other relevant instruments of the United Nations and the purposes and principles of the present Declaration is inadmissible,

Convinced that freedom of religion and belief should also contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples and to the elimination of ideologies or practices of colonialism and racial discrimination,

Noting with satisfaction the adoption of several, and the coming into force of some, conventions, under the aegis of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies, for the elimination of various forms of discrimination,

Concerned by manifestations of intolerance and by the existence of discrimination in matters of religion or belief still in evidence in some areas of the world,

Resolved to adopt all necessary measures for the speedy elimination of such intolerance in all its forms and manifestations and to prevent and combat discrimination on the ground of religion or belief,

Proclaims this Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief:

Article 1

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 2

1. No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on the grounds of religion or other belief.

2. For the purposes of the present Declaration, the expression "intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief" means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

Article 3

Discrimination between human being on the grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enunciated in detail in the International Covenants on Human Rights, and as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations.

Article 4

1. All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.

2. All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.

Article 5

1. The parents or, as the case may be, the legal guardians of the child have the right to organize the life within the family in accordance with their religion or belief and bearing in mind the moral education in which they believe the child should be brought up.

2. Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.

3. The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the ground of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for freedom of

religion or belief of others, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

4. In the case of a child who is not under the care either of his parents or of legal guardians, due account shall be taken of their expressed wishes or of any other proof of their wishes in the matter of religion or belief, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.

5. Practices of a religion or belief in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development, taking into account article 1, paragraph 3, of the present Declaration.

Article 6

In accordance with article I of the present Declaration, and subject to the provisions of article 1, paragraph 3, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief shall include, inter alia, the following freedoms:

- (a) To worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes;
- (b) To establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions;
- (c) To make, acquire and use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites or customs of a religion or belief;
- (d) To write, issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas;
- (e) To teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes;
- (f) To solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions;
- (g) To train, appoint, elect or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief;
- (h) To observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief;
- (i) To establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion and belief at the national and international levels.

Article 7

The rights and freedoms set forth in the present Declaration shall be accorded in national legislation in such a manner that everyone shall be able to avail himself of such rights and freedoms in practice.

Article 8

Nothing in the present Declaration shall be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

APPENDIX C

TRAINING AT THE FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE RELATED TO THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT

I. Summary of Major Developments

Since the first report on International Religious Freedom was issued in September 1999, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has worked continuously with the Office of International Religious Freedom, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, in implementing H.R. 2431 (the International Religious Freedom Act). The result of this cooperation has been the integration of religious freedom issues into the regular curriculum at FSI. During the period covered by this report, members of the FSI training staff took part in conferences dealing with religious freedom, persecution, conflict, and reconciliation hosted by academic institutions, think tanks, and nongovernmental organizations. The Political Training Division at FSI has continued to work with the staff of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to ensure that their insights are reflected in FSI's course offerings.

II. Courses Offered

The School of Professional and Area Studies (SPAS) at FSI offers training relevant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) in a variety of courses. The following are brief descriptions of courses offered by the divisions of Political Training, Orientation, Consular Training, and Area Studies.

FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER ORIENTATION (A-100)

During the A-100 Course, a senior State Department official from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) presents a session on international religious freedom. Additionally, students are provided key background materials on religious freedom on a CD Rom distributed to each officer. They are also directed to key websites containing related materials.

POLITICAL/ECONOMIC TRADECRAFT (PG-140)

This is a 3-week-long course. The students have been assigned for the first time to work in an embassy's or consulate's political, economic, or combined political/economic section overseas. Political/Economic Tradecraft is essentially a required course, in that State Department officers are assigned to take it by the personnel system and exceptions are rare. The State Department expects that a large proportion of these officers/students during their careers will be directly responsible for preparing their post's human rights and religious freedom reports.

As part of required consultations during the course, each student is asked to obtain the Annual Report on Religious Freedom and the report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom listed in Section III. In addition the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor provides a session during which religious freedom issues are featured prominently.

GLOBAL ISSUES (PP-510)

This 3-day course is given twice a year and is geared toward mid-level foreign affairs and national security professionals working for the Department of State and other agencies. In the fall, this course is combined with a separate module on human rights.

As in the Tradecraft courses, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor provides presentations during which religious freedom issues are featured together with other aspects of U.S. human rights policy.

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT WORKSHOP (PP-519)

This 4-day workshop focuses on various aspects of international conflict, especially the enhancement of skills needed to analyze the causes of conflict and develop a plan for preventive diplomacy. This course trains up to 30 foreign affairs and national security professionals at all levels working for the Department of State and other agencies.

The students are provided with reading materials including most of the key documents listed in Section III. Multiple segments in this course deal with religious persecution and identity as a factor in ethnic conflict, and reconciliation as a potential preventive step.

BASIC CONSULAR COURSE (PC-530)

PC-530 is a prerequisite for obtaining a consular title in the Foreign Service. It is aimed at new Foreign Services Officers preparing to go overseas to fill consular positions, dependents of U.S. government employees who will work as Consular Associates overseas, and domestic employees of the Bureau of Consular Affairs, who may serve temporary duty as consular officers.

The PC-530 schedule includes a lecture on Immigrant Visa that incorporates discussion of refugee and asylum issues as they pertain to consular officers. The subject also is covered in further detail in the Self-Instructional Guide (SIG) on immigrant visa processing. Role plays and other scenarios involving religious minorities have been incorporated into the American Citizen Services portion of the course.

AREA STUDIES

The Foreign Service Institute and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation annually sponsor a major symposium focused on religious freedom and the role of U.S. diplomats overseas. Officers in FSI language training and area studies courses take part in this symposium. The symposium brings together leading experts on religious issues and foreign affairs practitioners who can speak to the job related aspects of religious freedom issues to provide our officers with a clear understanding of the importance of these issues and the challenges and responsibilities they will face.

Throughout the year, the course chairs in the Area Studies Division, in cooperation with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, ensure that their courses address both regional and country specific issues of religion, religious freedom and human rights. Participants receive substantial information encompassing the full range of issues affecting particular regions, including religious freedom and human rights, religious history and religious traditions. Students also receive reading lists (and internet guidance) that direct them to even more detailed material.

AMBASSADORIAL TRAINING

The Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs regularly speaks to the Ambassadorial Seminar on the importance of this topic.

III. Background Material on Religious Freedom

The following background materials related to religious freedom are made available (as hard copy or through website address) to FSI students:

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

BACKGROUND MATERIALS PROVIDED TO STUDENTS AT FSI

- Mission Statement for the State Department Office of International Religious Freedom
- "Preparing the Annual Report on Religious Freedom for 2005"
- 2004 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom (Executive Summary)
- Main Web Page of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
 - List of current Members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
 - Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Highlights from Key International Documents:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 18)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Articles 18, 26 & 27)

LINKS TO INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BACKGROUND MATERIALS

1. 2004 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom (Executive Summary):
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35335.html>
2. Main Web Page of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, congressionally funded commission: <http://www.uscirtf.gov>
 - List of Members (current) for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom: <http://www.uscirtf.gov/about/commissioners.html>
 - Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom May 2005.
<http://www.uscirtf.gov/countries/publications/currentreport/2005annualRpt.pdf#page=1>
3. Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>
4. International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights
<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a-ccpr.html>

APPENDIX D

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS) AND THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT (IRFA)

The Department of Homeland Security has assumed responsibilities formerly charged to the Immigration and Naturalization Service under the IRFA. The DHS is committed to ensuring that all claims for refugee and asylum protection are treated with fairness, respect, and dignity and that all mandates of IRFA for these programs are properly implemented. This appendix summarizes the Department's actions during FY2004, as required under Section 102 (b)(1)(E) of IRFA.

I. Training of Asylum Officers and Refugee Adjudicators

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) provides extensive training to Asylum Officers to prepare them to perform their duties of adjudicating asylum claims. The training covers all grounds on which an asylum claim may be based, including religion. Asylum Officers receive approximately five weeks of specialized training related to international human rights law, non-adversarial interview techniques, and other relevant national and international refugee laws and principles.¹ During the five-week course and in local asylum office training, USCIS provides Asylum Officers with specialized training on religious persecution issues. With the passage of IRFA in 1998, the five-week training program expanded to incorporate information about IRFA as a part of the regular curriculum. In addition, a continual effort is made to include further discussion of religious persecution whenever possible in both the five-week course and in local asylum office training. The Asylum Division regularly updates its training materials and conducts training in local asylum offices to reflect any recently issued documents on religious persecution from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees as well as any recent developments in case law on this issue.

USCIS developed specialized training for refugee officers, the Refugee Application Adjudication Course (RAAC) as mandated by IRFA. The course currently consists of two-weeks of intensive instruction in refugee law and overseas refugee processing procedures. USCIS officers who are responsible for adjudicating refugee applications attend the course. The refugee law portion of RAAC was largely adapted from the Asylum Officer Basic Training Course (AOBTC) and new modules were developed specifically for overseas refugee processing. The RAAC curriculum pays special attention to religious persecution issues.

In addition to RAAC, USCIS also provides preparatory training to officers who are embarking on short-term overseas refugee-related assignments. This training includes detailed information on religious topics that will be encountered on the overseas assignment.

The Resource Information Center (RIC) in the Asylum Division of the Office of Asylum and Refugee Affairs serves both Asylum Officers and Refugee Adjudicators, and is responsible for the collection and/or production and distribution of materials regarding human rights conditions around the world. The RIC has published an online guide to web research that is posted on the internal DHS website, the Intranet. An Intranet site was created with links to government and non-government websites that contain information on religious persecution. The RIC separately cata-

¹Asylum Officers are required to complete two five-week training courses, the Adjudication and Asylum Officer Basic Training Course (AAOBTC), and the Asylum Officer Basic Training Course (AOBTC). The AAOBTC covers the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and basic immigration law. The AOBTC includes international human rights law, asylum and refugee law, interviewing techniques, decision-making and decision-writing skills, effective country conditions research skills, and computer skills. In addition compulsory in-service training for all asylum officers is held weekly.

logues religious freedom periodicals and separately codes RIC responses to field queries that involve religious issues.

II. Guidelines for Addressing Hostile Biases

Starting in 2002, USCIS included specific anti-bias provisions in the language services contract used by Asylum Officers in the Asylum Pre-Screening Program. The contract and interpreter oath also include special provisions that ensure the security and confidentiality of the credible fear process.

APPENDIX E

OVERVIEW OF U.S. REFUGEE POLICY

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates the world's refugee population to be approximately 9.2 million persons. Millions more are displaced within their own countries by war, famine, and civil unrest. The United States works with other governments and international and nongovernmental organizations to protect refugees, internally displaced persons, and conflict victims, and strives to ensure that survival needs for food, health care, and shelter are met. The United States has been instrumental in mobilizing a community of nations to work through these organizations to alleviate the misery and suffering of refugees worldwide, regularly supporting major relief and repatriation programs. In seeking durable long-term solutions for most refugees, the United States generally gives priority to the safe, voluntary return of refugees to their homelands. This policy, recognized in the Refugee Act of 1980, is also the preference of the UNHCR and the international community of nations that supports refugees. If safe, voluntary repatriation is not feasible, other durable solutions are sought, including resettlement in countries of asylum within the region and in other regions. Resettlement in third countries, including the United States, is appropriate for refugees in urgent need of protection and for refugees for whom other durable solutions are inappropriate or unavailable. The United States considers for admission as refugees persons of special humanitarian concern who can establish that they experienced past persecution or have a well-founded fear of future persecution in their home country on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The legal basis of the refugee admissions program is the Refugee Act of 1980, which embodies the American tradition of granting refuge to diverse groups suffering or fearing persecution. The act adopted the definition of "refugee" contained in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Over the past decade, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has been adjusting its focus away from the large refugee admissions programs that had developed during the Cold War for nationals of Communist countries and toward more diverse refugee groups that require protection for a variety of reasons, including religious belief. The following describes the program's efforts, by region, in meeting the needs of refugees worldwide who have faced religious persecution.

The U.S. admissions program processes refugee cases referred by UNHCR and U.S. embassies whose claims are based on persecution due to religious beliefs (in addition to race, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion). They have worked closely with UNHCR to strengthen this referral process.

Africa

For the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, religious freedom and peaceful coexistence are the rule, even where other conflicts hold sway. The primary exception to the rule has been Sudan. During the long civil war between "north" and "south," the Government conducted or tolerated attacks on civilians, indiscriminate bombing raids, and slave raids in the south, all with a religious as well as an ethnic dimension. The conflict in Darfur has featured most of the same human rights abuses, but is based on ethnic differences, without the religious dimensions of the north-south conflict. Islam has been the state religion and Muslims have dominated the Khartoum Government. In areas controlled by the Government, access to education as well as other social services is far easier for Muslims than for Christians and non-Muslims. The Government has restricted the activities of Christians, practitioners of traditional indigenous religions and other non-Muslims. However, under the January 9, 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the north-south conflict, a new constitution was drafted that included specific religious freedom guarantees based on a series of negotiated protocols. The installation of an in-

terim government took place on July 9. It remains to be seen, particularly given southern leader John Garang's untimely death in a helicopter crash, how things will change in Sudan. The U.S. admissions program has in recent years increased its focus in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kenya on these Sudanese victims of religious discrimination and repression. During FY 2004, 3,500 Sudanese refugees were resettled in the United States. With the end of the north-south conflict and the current peace prospects in south Sudan, efforts are now focused on repatriation for approximately 550,000 Sudanese refugees, rather than refugee admission to the U.S.

East Asia

While many governments in East Asia permit freedom of worship, religious believers face serious persecution in some countries. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) severely restricts religious freedom, including organized religious activity, except that which is supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the Government. While the DPRK Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," genuine religious freedom does not exist.

The situation in other countries such as China, Vietnam and Laos is mixed. The Chinese and Vietnamese constitutions provide for freedom of worship; however, both governments restrict activities of religious organizations. In China, most independent religious activities are either prohibited or severely restricted. Despite dramatic increases in religious observance in China, the government continues to suppress, intimidate, harass, detain and imprison followers of those religions it cannot directly control, most notably the (underground) Catholic Church loyal to the Vatican, Protestant "house churches," some Muslim groups, Buddhists loyal to the Dalai Lama, and the Falun Gong spiritual movement. In Vietnam, there were a number of recent improvements in law and practice; however, official oversight of recognized religions and harassment or repression of followers of some non-recognized religions continued. Some religious practitioners, especially ethnic minorities in the Central and Northwest Highlands, continue to suffer arrest, arbitrary detention, efforts to force renunciations of their faith, and physical intimidation, though reports of such incidents have declined. Vietnam has released a number of religious prisoners but others remain incarcerated or face administrative and civil restrictions. In Laos, Protestants in particular suffer periodic arrest and imprisonment. Local officials have threatened to expel families from their village unless they renounce their faiths and, in isolated cases, these threats have been acted on. In Burma, the Government maintains a pervasive internal security apparatus that generally infiltrates or monitors meetings and activities of all organizations, including religious groups. The Government actively promotes Buddhism over other religions as a means of boosting its own legitimacy, and continues harsh discrimination against members of minority religions. At the same time, Buddhist monks who exercise their rights to free speech and association by calling for democracy and political dialogue with pro-democracy forces face severe repression, including imprisonment.

Europe

The breakup of the Soviet Union initially led to a resurgence of religious practice throughout the region, but in recent years the fear of newer religious groups, many of them with ties to coreligionists in other countries, has led to a backlash in a number of the newly independent states. Most post-Soviet states regulate religious groups and activities, specifying a set of "traditional" religions with certain privileges denied to other groups. In Russia and Belarus, some minority religious groups suffer harassment and difficulties finding places to meet; groups with international ties are sometimes accused of being security threats. In some countries, one's faith may be associated with ethnicity, patriotism, nationalism, or even with terrorism; and authorities may be suspicious of religious groups perceived as having political agendas and organizations. This is especially true in some of the Central Asian republics where, support for political Islam and terrorism may be found in small segments of the population. In the case of Uzbekistan, Islamic groups not approved by the State are seen as potential terrorists and suffer harassment or imprisonment; in the case of Turkmenistan, all religious groups are seen as potential threats to security and therefore are closely controlled and monitored by the State. The U.S. refugee admission program provides resettlement opportunities to religious minority members (as identified in the Lautenberg Amendment) with close family ties to the United States. In addition, UNHCR has recently increased the number of referrals to the program. Refugee admissions based on grounds of religious persecution have been significant in both the Bosnia and Kosovo resettlement efforts. The U.S. refugee admissions program has provided protection to Muslims, Jews, Evangelical Christians, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians as well as individuals of other reli-

religious minorities. The Department of State will continue to work with the UNHCR, nongovernmental organizations (both faith-based and non-sectarian), human rights groups, and U.S. missions to identify persons who qualify under the 1980 act on religious grounds for whom resettlement is appropriate.

Latin America/Caribbean

In general, religious freedom is widely recognized and enjoyed in Latin America. The key exception is Cuba, where the Government engages in active efforts to monitor and control religious institutions, including surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of clergy and members; evictions from and confiscation of places of worship; and preventive detention of religious activists. It also uses registration as a mechanism of control; by refusing to register new denominations it makes them vulnerable to charges of illegal association. However, despite these obstacles to religious expression, church attendance has grown in recent years. The U.S. refugee admissions program specifically includes religious minorities and other human rights activists among the list of eligible groups.

Near East and South Asia

Repression of religious minorities is common in some countries in the Middle East and South Asia. In Pakistan, the Government fails to protect the rights of religious minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith fostered religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities, including Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, and Zikris. In India, the Government sometimes did not act swiftly enough to counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by some leaders of state and local governments to limit religious freedom. In Saudi Arabia public non-Muslim worship is prohibited, as is conversion of a Muslim to another religion. In Iran, members of minority religions continue to face arrest, harassment, and discrimination. Iranian refugees who belong to religious minorities (Baha'is, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians) are able to apply directly for U.S. resettlement. In addition, the UNHCR and U.S. embassies in the region facilitate access to the admissions program for individuals of other nationalities who may qualify on religious grounds. Congress passed the Specter Amendment which adds "members of a religious minority in Iran" to the list of categories of aliens who may benefit from the reduced evidentiary standards for demonstrating a well-founded fear of persecution in refugee processing, established pursuant to the "Lautenberg Amendment" contained in Section 213 of the foreign Operations, Export Financing, and related Programs Appropriations Act, 1990 (P.L. 101-167). The Department of State will continue efforts to improve access to refugee processing through dialogue with nongovernmental organizations and human rights groups who may identify victims with valid claims based on grounds of religious persecution. The UNHCR also has addressed religious persecution issues in several regional workshops to increase the sensitivity of protection and resettlement officers to victims of religious persecution.

