



Fact Sheet

Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs
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China and Human Rights

U.S. Policy: Increasing respect for human rights is a top U.S. Government priority in China and the U.S. regularly raises human rights issues with China, including during the February visit to China of Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Labor and Human Rights, Barry F. Lowenkron.

- The U.S. urges China to promote and respect the rule of law, religious freedom, and grass-roots democratization, as well as to end coercive birth limitation practices.
- The U.S. encourages the Chinese government to provide greater political and civil rights to the Chinese people in accordance with international norms and has pressed for the release or parole of all those detained or imprisoned for the peaceful expression of political views or religious practice.
- The U.S. also continues to support dialogue between China and the Dalai Lama or his representatives and urges concrete progress be made to resolve longstanding differences between the two sides.
- The U.S. also supports dialogue between China and the Vatican to resolve differences.

Some Improvements in Social Mobility/Personal Freedoms. At the same time, China's economic growth and reform since 1978 has improved dramatically the lives of hundreds of millions of Chinese, increased social mobility and expanded the scope of personal freedom. This has meant substantially greater freedom of travel, employment opportunity, educational and cultural pursuits, job and housing choices, and access to information. But as the President has said, economic growth alone does not determine whether a society is making progress; progress is defined by the participation of people in decisions affecting their lives, access to information, and the right to worship as they see fit.

Religious Adherents Increase in China. Religious observances in China are varied and widespread. The official Protestant Church estimates a baptized membership of more than 16 million today, compared with 3.8 million in 1987, and less than a million in 1949. Church officials and foreign observers say official church membership is growing at a rate of 2,000 converts a day. At present there are some 55,000 churches and registered Protestant meeting places. Additionally, there are more than 30 million Chinese worshipping in an unknown number of unregistered "house" churches. The official Protestant Chinese Christian Council includes many denominations, such as Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal. Many churches have turned into full-service institutions with bible studies, prayer meetings, women's groups and choir practice. Roman Catholic Church membership, both registered and unregistered, is also rising. The "underground" Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church claims a membership much larger than the membership of the official Chinese Patriotic Catholic church, which is estimated at five million persons. Recently, several Roman Catholic bishops were ordained with the consent of the Vatican and the Chinese Government. However, the Vatican sees normalization of diplomatic relations with China as contingent on its ability to ordain bishops.

In addition to Christians, the government estimates there are 100 million Buddhists and 20 million Muslims in China. Finally, several hundred million Chinese practice traditional folk religions, sometimes labeled Daoism or Buddhism, and their numbers continue to grow rapidly.

Human Rights Record Poor. China's human rights record remains poor and the government continues to commit numerous and serious abuses, many of which are documented in the U.S. Government's Human Rights Report for 2005. Abuses reported have included arbitrary and lengthy incommunicado detention, forced confessions, torture, and mistreatment of prisoners as well as severe restrictions on freedom of speech, the press, assembly, association, religion, privacy, and worker rights, and coercive birth limitation. In 2005, China stepped up monitoring, harassment, intimidation, and arrest of journalists, Internet writers, defense lawyers, religious activists, and political dissidents. The activities of NGOs, especially those relating to the rule of law and expansion of judicial review, have been curtailed. In recent years, China has passed new criminal and civil laws that provide additional safeguards to citizens, but previously debated political and legal reforms--including expanding elections to the township level and reform of the reeducation through labor system--have been put on hold.

Continuing Restrictions. China continues to restrict the freedom to worship, limiting organized religious practice to state-registered religious bodies. While China has issued a statement that allows small groups of people to worship in their homes, without requiring government approval, in recent years, some "underground" mosques, temples, seminaries, and Protestant "house church" group meeting places were closed, meetings disrupted, and some places of worship were destroyed.

- China also has stated that it allows parents to make decisions with regard to the religious education of minors under 18 but concern remains over the implementation of this policy.
- The government has restricted the practices of Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims where it alleges links to separatist efforts, and with regard to the Uighur Muslims, has sometimes used the global war on terror as a pretext for restrictions and repression.
- In July 1999, China began a crackdown against the Falun Gong spiritual movement; its campaign against the group continues.



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